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MY STORY

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"PATTY."

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MY STORY.

VOL. III.

MY STORY.

BY

KATHARINE S. MACQUOID,

AUTHOR OF

"PATTY," "THROUGH NORMANDY,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,

13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1875.

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251. b. 481.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL,
BLENHEIM HOUSE.

MY STORY.

CHAPTER I.

RECONCILED.

THE Abbé seemed to be on the look-out for me; he was standing at the top of the steps. He waved his hand and came forward to me.

He was as charmingly courteous as ever. What a rare gift manner is! After the first greeting he turned from me to Angélique.

"I think you are wanted, *la mère*," he spoke to the old servant with such a pleasant smile. "Monsieur Henri arrived just now, and he is with his wife, and no doubt the interview will agitate her.

"Ah, *mon Dieu*, he has come, then!" Angélique looked pale for an instant, and then her eyes shone with joy; "*bien, bien*, Monsieur l'Abbe," and she hurried off to her charge.

The Abbé gave a little sigh, but I exclaimed "Is Mr. Dayrell really come? Oh, I am so very glad; now poor Mrs. Dayrell will be quite happy again."

He looked at me with such an inquisitive, searching glance that I felt puzzled and abashed. It seemed to me, too, that his manner was changed. He was as courteous, but he was so serious, I missed the fatherly playfulness which had made me so fond of him. He led the way to the salon instead of stopping at his study-door, and gave me a chair as if I had been a princess.

"Madame—Mademoiselle will excuse my absence," he said, bowing; "but I have still to arrange some matters with my sister."

He went away, and left me chilled and

disappointed. I could only imagine that Madame La Peyre had told him about this morning's work, and Angélique said he had seen Captain Brand. He seemed displeased with me. And yet no; why do I always think about self first? I suppose because I love nothing else so well. It is far more likely that the dear, good man was thinking so much of Mr. and Mrs. Dayrell that he forgot all about my affairs. How happy they must be, and yet how they must wish they had never vexed one another, and had not wasted all these months in making one another's hearts ache! I remember thinking, a long time ago, that it would be charming for a husband and wife not to love one another just at first, to quarrel and to part, and then to fall desperately in love with one another, and meet again, to be happy ever after. I once read a story like this. What silly, unreal thoughts girls have! Poor me! I am not eighteen yet, but I know I shall never be a girl

again. I have grown to feel so old, oh, so very old, to-day!

The door opens very gently, and a gentleman comes in. It is, of course, Mr. Dayrell, and he comes up to me, as if he expected to find me there.

He shakes hands with me. "You must let me thank you for the affection you have shown my wife." He smiles; but I see his lip quivering under his moustache. "She talks constantly of Gertrude."

"How is she?" I speak hastily, for I do not quite know what to say to Mr. Dayrell.

He is very interesting-looking, tall, and rather slender; his brown hair is full of grey locks, and it waves over his broad, thoughtful forehead. He has a long, irregular-shaped nose, and large, bright, sweet, melancholy brown eyes. I think he has a good mouth, but it is hidden by his beard and moustache. He is something like the pictures I have seen of Charles the First,

only Mr. Dayrell's is a grander, nobler face than King Charles's, I do not think Mr. Dayrell could be weak, or deceitful either.

"She is better, they say;" his bright, happy look faded into deep sadness; "but to me she is fearfully weak and changed. She did not look much older than you do when I last saw her."

At this he turns to the window. My heart goes out to him at once. I like men to be brave and self-contained; they are more difficult to understand; but, then, how much more interesting than men are who talk easily about themselves and their feelings!

"She will soon get well *now*," I say, cheerfully; "I suppose I must not see her to-day."

"Why not?" he says; "it must do her good to see anyone she loves."

Even I know better than this; but I believe I like Mr. Dayrell all the more for

being such a thorough man, without any small feminine wisdom in his brain.

It is not easy to talk to Mr. Dayrell; he goes off into reveries, and rouses himself with a start to answer my questions; and, besides, I can only talk to him about Sydney and places he has visited, for it is awkward to speak much of Mrs. Dayrell.

It is a great relief when Madame La Peyre joins us. She goes straight up to Mr. Dayrell, and takes no notice of me; but still she and I have seen one another again, and that takes off some of the restraint.

I sit silent while they talk in the window recess; suddenly I remember that that unhappy letter still lies unread in my pocket. I am not wanted; I am nothing to anybody here; there can be no selfishness in going to my own room.

When I get there I feel so tired, so utterly exhausted, that I lie down on my bed and I begin to cry. But this is very

foolish. I have been longing and waiting all these months for Mr. Dayrell's return, and I ought to be singing a hymn of praise, instead of crying like a baby. All the misery of the morning tries to come back, but I will not give way. I take out Eugène's letter, and open it at last.

Well, I have read it twice, it is so short that I almost know it by heart; and yet I am quite calm, and not a bit in the excited state I was in when I first heard from him. Perhaps this is natural; perhaps it was only the novelty that so disturbed me; and it is possible that that delightful thrill, which seemed to me something quite unearthly, cannot be felt twice.

I am sure this is a charming letter. It tells me all Eugène feels, and the joy with which he looks forward to seeing me. And he is coming, yes, he is really coming—his mother is not well, or he would have come with the Abbé; as soon as he can possibly leave Paris, he will come to Château

Fontaine, and then, he says, we shall be perfectly happy.

Perfectly happy! Shall I be perfectly happy? I say the words over to myself, and I come to the conclusion that they are only words. No one is perfectly happy. Even Angélique's talk proves that we are only likely to be happy when we do not follow our own inclinations. I should have thought, a week ago, that to be with Eugène at Château Fontaine must be perfect happiness; and now a thorn seems to have come into my feelings. Whenever I think of his visit, I feel a sharp sting.

It is, perhaps, petty of me, but I feel a kind of anger with Eugène for having taught me to conceal our letters. Certainly, now that I feel so much older, and, somehow, so very much calmer, I see that I might have and ought to have refused to do this; and I feel keenly that it would have been much better to do without those letters, for the misery I have suffered far

outweighs any pleasure they gave; and those two answers that I wrote gave me a great deal of trouble. But then, when I see Eugène again, I suppose his influence will be as great as it was then, and I shall yield to it in the same way, although nothing shall again make me consent to the slightest act of deceit.

It seems to me that I have been infatuated; falsehood, or even the slightest concealment, has always been so very abhorrent to me. If my dear mother had lived, this could not have happened, for I could not have deceived her. Well, of course, I could not; for no girl worth the name of a woman can attempt to deceive her mother, even in the smallest matter, unless she is absolutely a wicked girl. But as I sit thinking, trying to keep my thoughts from Captain Brand, and to fix them on my meeting with Eugène, the wound grows sharper; a feeling much deeper than any I have yet known, except that which came

on board the *Eclair*, when it seemed to me that my grief for my mother had been forgotten. I cannot understand this feeling. I struggle resolutely against it, and yet, at each struggle, it takes a stronger hold. It is a feeling of wrong-doing. Ever since I parted from Captain Brand this morning, our marriage has taken a real shape, and I have grown more and more powerless when I try to deny its existence. I do not mean its present existence, for even Captain Brand says, if possible it shall be set aside —and he has willingly set me free. But this feeling of remorse is for the past. If I really was his wife, then, indeed, I have been very, very wrong; so wrong that——

But I cannot sit here brooding. I start up, and shake the hair out of my eyes.

After all, I did not know I was doing wrong, and I am punished by this shame and misery. Captain Brand was harsh; if he had been calmer, perhaps I should have been able to speak; my silence must have

made him think very badly of me, and I can never justify myself. All I can do now is to try not to be self-willed any more. If I have not my mother to help me, Angélique has made me see where I can get help and guidance, and surely this help ought to keep me true as much as any mother.

CHAPTER II.

TEARS, IDLE TEARS.

SOME few days passed by after this before I saw Mrs. Dayrell. Her husband sometimes said she was better, sometimes she was not so well; but he grew more and more silent and pre-occupied, except just at times, when he had the bright sweet smile that I had seen at first.

I spent my time chiefly with the Abbé, who gave me readings in French history, and took walks with me in the park, and talked with me on every subject but the one I dreaded. I longed to go into the village; but the Abbé says that in France

young ladies must not walk out alone, and I try to submit patiently. Angélique has promised to take me over to Caudebec some market-day when she is less occupied with Mrs. Dayrell. She offered Rosalie as an escort, but I refused. Rosalie has kept out of my way since that morning, and I do not wish to have any talk with her, though I believe I am more reconciled to her ugliness since she has wreaked her spite. I dreaded something more tragic, for I feel sure she is half an idiot; and I believe it is all jealousy of her mother's love for me, poor creature!

The weather has become warmer. The buds on the trees get larger every day—little rosy cones, exquisite in tint, swell out of the larch branches; and snowdrops and violets are frequent in the neglected shrubberies.

Early one morning I am busy getting a bunch of these to give to Mr. Dayrell for his wife, when I see Angélique coming to

find me. She wants to take me to Mrs. Dayrell.

"She is stronger — much stronger, Mademoiselle; but Mademoiselle will please to remember what I have asked her."

"You spoil her," I say, teazingly; "she must be so happy, now she has her husband again, that she ought to be in good temper with all the world."

Angélique stands looking at me with that puzzling expression which I never saw in anyone's eyes but hers; it is not a glance of reproof, it is as if she tried to look into me thoughts that she will not speak. All she says, as she follows me to the house, is, "How many weeks our poor Madame has been in bed! she must be very weary."

I smile at the covert rebuke.

"You are a clever woman," I begin— but Rosalie is on the steps, screaming in her shrillest notes for *la mère* Angélique.

So I have to find my way alone to the sick-room.

I meet Mr. Dayrell on the stairs, but he takes no notice of me. He looks pale and tired. I knock twice at the door before the faint voice says, "Come in."

Mrs. Dayrell's face was flushed, and her eyes looked as if she had been crying. I fancied I saw tears still on her cheeks. She gave a keen look as I came in, but this faded, and she sighed.

"Well, Gertrude"—her tone was not hearty—"you see I am still a prisoner. What have you been doing with yourself?—you look ill. Ah, this is thoughtful," as I laid the flowers on the bed. Then she paused, pinching the fingers of my hand as it lay in hers. "Did you meet anyone, child?" she said timidly.

I could only think that she wanted me to say something about her husband. So I launched into admiration. "I met Mr. Dayrell—I like him so much; he quite

fulfils the word 'charming';" I added, "Don't you long to make haste and get well, so that you may be with him always?"

She looked so strange that I felt frightened.

"You are like all the rest, Gertrude. I wonder if I shall ever find anyone able to understand me or my feelings."

She spoke bitterly. But I was still too much subdued in spirit to be vexed by her tone. I stood silent, for I did not understand her.

"You are a good child," she said presently, "you have learned patience; you were not so patient when first you came to Merdon. Perhaps, like the rest of the world, you have more respect for me, now that I have an actual husband, than when I was in the position of a deserted wife."

I felt shocked that she should speak so openly, and I felt wounded too, and I suppose she saw this, for she said gently,

"Kiss me, child. I know I am unbear-

able. Look at me, Gertrude, and then wonder at human perverseness. You saw me at Merdon pining to death for the sight of my husband, and cheered into life, by the hope of his return. Well, he is restored to me even before I hoped, and he is—" her lip trembled, and tears sprang into her eyes—"Ah, child, words cannot tell what he is. Ought I not to be happy and contented?"

I thought she was asking the question sincerely.

"Yes, of course; and you are happy. You look ever so much better and brighter."

"Do I?" Her eyes glowed with sudden light. "Give me a looking-glass, Gertrude. Henri says I look so weak and ill —so much older."

She sighed heavily. I looked round. All the mirrors were fastened to the wall. Mrs. Dayrell laughed, in her old bitter way.

"You are as slow-witted as"—she checked herself. "Your wits are no nim-

bler than a man's, Gertrude, after all. If there had been a hand-glass on my dressing-table, I should not have needed to ask you for it."

Her contempt so goaded me that, without stopping to reflect, I hurried off to my room, and fetched the tiny little mirror which had been put in my travelling-bag at Hâvre. But when Mrs. Dayrell looked into it she turned white, and fell back on her pillow. I was frightened, and I got the smelling-bottle I had seen her use, and held it for her to smell at. She soon opened her eyes.

"Thank you," she said faintly. "Some day I will tell you what you have done for me. Sit down now, and wait; I shall be better presently. I have something still to say to you."

I sat waiting, stealing compunctious glances at the pale face on the pillow. How that one gaze at herself had quieted Mrs. Dayrell! It had acted like an opiate.

I grew uneasy. Had Angélique purposely kept the invalid from the sight of her own worn face? I thought I would steal quietly from the room, and summon help. But Mrs. Dayrell seemed to guess my thoughts.

"Stay, Gertrude." She did not look round. "One can easily deceive you. You are sympathetic, but you are not observant. I asked you a question just now, and you thought you gave me the right answer."

I saw her meaning now.

"I think I did answer rightly," I said bluntly. "You said, '*Ought* I not to be happy and contented?'"

A smile flitted across her face, but it was sad again in a moment.

"I am too weak to tease, or I should say Gertrude has turned preacher. No—I am neither happy nor contented; and I make my husband miserable by my perverse folly. He wishes me dead, child—I

know he does; and he will not have long to wait."

"Oh! hush!" I cried out in distress. "You must not say it. It is not true. Why, he only thinks of you. He hardly ever speaks to anyone, and when he does speak, it is about you."

She smiled.

"You simple child! If his mind were at ease, he would scarcely brood over his happiness in silence. No. It has always been so. I always make those I love miserable." A sob came in her voice, but she went on. "I wonder why I can speak to you so freely, Gertrude; more freely than I have ever been able to speak to any human creature. It is, perhaps, because you are like me in some ways. But I believe it is, most of all, because of your isolation, and because I know by instinct that as yet you have not found anyone in whom you could confide, even if you ever commit such a folly. I believe," she turned

round and looked at me fully, "you are more likely to confide in me than in Madame La Peyre or in Angélique."

She looked so searchingly that I was obliged to answer before I had quite decided.

"Perhaps—" and then I felt guilty, for I could not speak quite freely to Mrs. Dayrell. I shrank from her confidence, though it was perhaps ungenerous after the open way in which she had spoken to me. I suppose I am reserved and ignorant; but it seemed strange that anyone could speak so freely of her husband. "But then, I have nothing to tell you. You know all about me."

As I said this, I suddenly remembered that probably Mrs. Dayrell had not heard of Captain Brand's last visit. But she was too full of thought to notice my confusion.

"Take me as a warning," she said. "Never wish for happiness. At Merdon, after I saw that good Mr. Howard, I used

to lie picturing my meeting with Henri—he was so loving and tender—as he is; for it is not his fault if I am vexatious. And I was so good, so sweet, so everything that a wife should be! And that I am not; but I was, just for the first day. And now—now, Gertrude," she clasped her long thin fingers over her eyes, "I am more like a wasp than a woman."

I saw tears shining through her fingers, and I rose up gently.

"I believe I must go to the Abbé," I said. "But I will come again, to-morrow."

"Good-bye," she said, but without looking up.

I moved gently across the room; and I suppose she thought I was gone. Just as I opened the door, I heard a moan, and I stopped.

"Oh, Henri, my darling—my darling, how much better not to have seen you again than to grieve you by my temper and self-will!"

I closed the door noiselessly. In the wrung agony of her voice I had learned the strength of her feelings, and also the strength of an indulged sin.

I crept along the gallery, shuddering and trembling. The salon door stood open. The Abbé had a letter in his hand; he was talking earnestly to Madame La Peyre. I went in, but they did not notice me.

"Poor woman! Yes, Madame La Comtesse is dead, and Eugène is no longer a minor," the Abbé said. "And worse than all, he wants to come here."

"Yes, yes, poor boy; he is sad; why should he not come?"

I moved quickly up to the fire-place beside which they stood, and the Abbé saw me.

"No," he said, "it is not desirable that he should come." And then he turned to me, with his sweet smile, "Mademoiselle is ready for our history reading," and he led the way to the study.

CHAPTER III.

MARKET-DAY IN AN OLD NORMAN TOWN.

A WEEK has dragged on wearily. Mr. Dayrell looks yet more melancholy, and he shakes his head sadly when I ask how his wife is. No one speaks in the gallery, and we move gently past the double doors which lead to her rooms; there seems to be a hushed mystery in the house, working on silently to some sad ending. What will the ending be? Will Mrs. Dayrell die, and never have the solace of atoning to her husband for all her wrong-doing? I seem to have learned lately that lip-repentance is not worth much; it may relieve for a moment, but I

do not think it can cure that aching longing to wipe out faults by doing better deeds. If I believed in lip-repentance I would write to Captain Brand, and ask the Abbé to send on my letter—the Abbé is so clever that he would be able to do it —but this seems idle. Captain Brand is such a man of deeds himself that he would only smile and pity, and I want more than his pity—oh, I must have his esteem, or I can never be at peace again.

Ever since that terrible day—the day which first set me free from all that degradation of deceit, by degrading me for ever with Captain Brand—I have been very sad and quiet. I think, after the first tempest had passed over, quite as great an upset, although a more peaceful one, happened in my thoughts about myself and my life. It was perhaps the shame, perhaps that talk with Angélique, perhaps something I feel too deeply to talk about; but the effect remains, and it is a very strange and

startling one—*I have begun to hate myself*; and when I said just now, I long to gain Captain Brand's esteem, something seemed to whisper, "Don't waste time in wishing, but learn to become what he cannot help esteeming." I feel sure that this constantly-rising thought is not the selfish preoccupation which I so dislike to remember, but that, if I only could find it out, there is something yet left for me to do.

It seems natural to think of Eugène in the midst of this sadness about Mrs. Dayrell, because he must be in such grief. He never talked about his mother, but he must be so wretched at losing her. I asked Madame La Peyre about Madame de Vaucresson's death.

She shook her head.

"Ah, it is all very sad," she said. "It appears that this illness had been coming on a long time, and she knew it, but she would not send for the doctors till too late. She was too proud to submit to illness, so

at last she died quite suddenly; and though she wished to alter her will, she had not the power. My brother is very sorry; he says it is a great mistake."

"What is a great mistake?"

"The Countess's will, my child. The young Count de Vaucresson is only one-and-twenty, and his mother, to whom all the property belonged, has kept everything in her own hands, and he has no knowledge of affairs. If she had lived, he was not to have come into his inheritance till he was twenty-five; but, by some oversight, her death was not provided against, and my brother does not consider Eugène fit to have the management of property."

"Then he is quite his own master?"

"Yes." And Madame La Peyre looked in my face, and I saw in hers that half-comic mixture of compunction and disquiet which I had seen there more than once at Merdon.

After this, Eugène's name was not men-

tioned between us—indeed, we all grew absorbed in anxiety for Mrs. Dayrell. Our thoughts seemed centred on those closed doors in the gallery—and they were closed now to all but the husband and Angélique, except when the little bustling doctor drove over from Caudebec.

I was walking up and down the terrace with Madame La Peyre when he arrived. He ran up the steps, bowing so rapidly as he passed that only a vision of his red nose, with its wrinkled bridge, and his goggle-eyes behind blue glasses, could be seen.

"Ah! he is a wonderful man, our doctor," said Madame; he can tell us all about the ancient coins and vases that are dug up at Lillebonne, and he knows the whole history of our church; he can tell the age of every bit of it. It is singular that he should not be able to cure our Barbara!"

She was still speaking when the doctor came out of the house. His face was red-

der than before; he frowned, and his bow was still more hurried as he passed us. As he disappeared, Mr. Dayrell joined us. He looked excited and vexed, but he spoke gently.

"Eugénie," he said, "there is no use in Doctor Véron's visits; he does not do Barbara any good, and the sight of him irritates her. She craves for an English doctor, and I shall go at once to England to get one."

"Thou, Henri, to England? Is it not better to write, or even fetch one from Paris?"

"No, no!" He spoke much more rapidly; he seemed to think he was alone with Madame La Peyre. "I will do what she wishes. I am so glad to go!—glad to have a chance of proving to Barbara that I really wish her to live!"

"Hush!"

Madame La Peyre spoke quickly, but I slipped away, and was soon hidden in the

shrubbery. This was, then, the secret of his constant unhappiness—his wife would not believe in his forgiveness or his love.

When I see Mrs. Dayrell again, shall I tell her what he said just now? And yet, why should I tell her? Loving her as he does, he has long ago told her all that could convince her, if she could believe; and again I saw that despairing face and those woeful, incredulous blue eyes, and heard the mournful wail of her last words. Surely she will believe he loves her when she hears of his journey; and perhaps the English doctor will free her of some of this pain, and when she suffers less she will be more reasonable.

The last few days have been so genial and Spring-like that the buds have swelled rapidly, and some of the branches have put on a powdery hue of most tender green. The birds are holding quite a concert in the shrubbery this morning. As I listen to it, the sad atmosphere of these days

lightens, and I feel my heart swelling with hope. It is impossible that, while all nature is preparing itself for the bright joy of Spring, this life, which has the power of making another life so happy, should be cut off.

I must ask Angélique to tell me her real opinion of Mrs. Dayrell's state. Going back into the house, I meet Angélique in the hall.

"Do you know Mr. Dayrell is going to England?" I ask.

"But yes, and for that reason, if Mademoiselle wills, I can go with her to market to-morrow. I shall not be able to leave Madame while Monsieur her husband is away, and he is to start to-morrow afternoon. Can Mademoiselle be ready at six o'clock?" she said, doubtfully; "and will Mademoiselle pardon if we travel in a cart? —for there is only one carriage fit for use now, and that will have to take Monsieur Dayrell and Monsieur l'Abbé to Yvetôt."

"Oh! Angélique, how delightful! Be sure you call me in time."

I felt as excited as I suppose a girl feels at the prospect of her first ball. So many months of seclusion made the journey of a few miles with Angélique an adventure to look forward to. I woke several times in fear of having overslept myself, and at last, when Angélique came to rouse me, I was fast asleep.

Before I was dressed she brought me a cup of coffee; but Madame La Peyre said we were to breakfast at the inn at Caudebec, so we were soon on our way to the gate. How lovely the park looked in the early morning! A faint wreath of mist fading away between the boles of the larch-trees, gave a velvet tint to everything, and set me wondering why Nature is so much lovelier when there is a touch of indistinctness over her.

The village was astir, although the church-clock struck six as we passed it;

Angélique nodded to several old women and children standing in the pretty little gardens behind the hedges that bordered each side of the road. Old Mathieu drove our vehicle, which was only a cart, although it had a comfortable cushioned seat, and as easy springs as a carriage. We soon turned into the road beside the river, and I was glad of old Mathieu's flow of gossip, for the remembrance of my first arrival jarred painfully; our last journey had been made under cover of darkness, and we had all been completely engrossed with anxiety for Mrs. Dayrell till we reached Château Fontaine.

Now, as we jogged on between the lofty wooded *côte* on one side and the broad river shimmering through the grey silvery trees which bordered the sloping meadows forming its bank, my heart sank like lead as I remembered. What an innocent, harmless child I was then, and how fond Captain Brand was of me! What care he took of

me! I thought of him then as of a kind elder brother. Spite of my loneliness, and spite of the unknown home before me, I certainly must have enjoyed that journey, or I could not recall it with such regret. And then—though I was not deceitful at that time—I was uttterly selfish; I had no thought for Captain Brand; it seemed to me only right that he should minister to my needs.

"Voilà la Maison Blanche," says Mathieu, and we pass beneath a large white house high up above the road. "Tiens," he goes on, in his toothless gossip, "v'là Madame Vagnon;" and from a gate in an orchard a little beyond drives out a sort of chaise-cart, with a stout little dapple-grey Norman horse. There are two women in the cart, wearing high-crowned muslin caps. One looks small, and pale, and withered; the other, who is driving, has a fine Norman face, with aquiline features, and clear, rather stern blue eyes. She

must have been very handsome once; now her fair skin has turned to a golden brown, and looks dry and baked by constant exposure.

"Bonjour, la mère Angélique!" she calls out, in a high-pitched, cheerful voice, reining up her eager little horse to let us come along-side. "Bonjour, Monsieur Mathieu —bonjour, Mam'selle;"—she gave me a quick, scrutinizing glance—"and how goes it at Château Fontaine with Monsieur l'Abbé and Madame La Peyre? It goes well, does it not?"

"Yes, yes, I thank you, Madame. And how is it with Mademoiselle Henriette?" Angélique and the little withered woman smile at each other with, it seemed to me, a peculiar and significant sweetness; and then, after a few inquiries for Monsieur Mathieu's rheumatism, and a hope that Mademoiselle will enjoy the market—this said with much smiling grace—Madame

Vagnon shakes her reins and off trots the Norman horse on the road to Caudebec.

"Who is that little old woman, Angélique? I can see she is a friend of yours."

Angélique smiles.

"Everyone loves Mam'selle Henriette, Mademoiselle," she says; "when she was little she had a fall, and ever since she has had one leg shorter that the other, but no one ever heard her murmur. She always thinks it is she who ought to comfort others; she never will be waited on."

I thought this was perhaps the cause of her sympathy with Angélique. I asked if she lived at the White House.

"No, Mademoiselle; Madame Vagnon would gladly give her a home there, but Henriette says she will work as long as she can; so she has a room in Caudebec, where she mends lace and irons collars and caps."

"Bah!" says old Mathieu, "that has not

common-sense in it; she could be quite useful enough to her sister at the White House, to make up for the trifle of expense she would be at in keeping her; in my opinion it is always foolish for families to divide."

Angélique smiles at the old walnut face. "It is true; and yet, my friend," she says, cheerfully, "I think, if you were Henriette, you would do as she does."

Our brown horse has been trotting fast, and we are by this time close to Caudebec. As we drive on to the quay, under the now leafless double avenue, the scene is so busy and full of life that I hardly recognise it. A number of waggons, with lofty, green hoods, are drawn up under the trees, and along the quay are ranges of booths filled with bales of cloth and merino, and skirts and jackets of the gayest patterns. Crockery, too, straggles over the quay, spread on straw, seemingly in danger of being trodden to pieces. The market men

and women are still busy arranging their wares.

We drive into the inn-yard, and then I follow Angélique up a street leading off from the quay. On each side of us are shrieking old women, selling fish—very strange and hideous-looking monsters, quite unlike any I have ever seen. We pass quickly up the winding street; through the nodding, sharply-pointed, wooden gables, dark with age, I get an exquisite view of the beautiful grey church-spire.

Angélique bends down and whispers, "Mademoiselle will like to hear *la messe?*"

I follow her across the crowded market-place, smiling to myself, towards the church which stands at the end. I see now why la mère Angélique started so early fron Château Fontaine.

She does not go into the body of the church, but up the side, and, pausing, kneels down on a chair near one of the small chapels. I see that the candles on

the altar of this chapel are lighted, and presently comes a little acolyte, followed by a priest, and the service begins. It is very soothing and peaceful in the early morning to hear the low-toned, sweet voices, and to see the devout faces round me; so many market-women have come in for mass, some with full baskets stowed away carefully beside them. I forget that I cannot follow the Latin service, and I say my prayers heartily.

It is a grand old church, with lofty arches and painted windows, and, as we come out through the great western entrance, I see a font with a quaint, richly-carved oaken cover.

The hushed quiet of the church seems like a dream when the last baize door has swung-to behind us, and we are in the busy, noisy crowd that throngs the Grande Place. Angélique goes on right into the middle of the market, and I follow close at her heels, bewildered by the mixed Babel

of sounds, but more amused than bewildered. The Place is longer than it is broad, and the centre is filled with covered booths of fruit and vegetables. Round about are market-women with baskets, some filled with a pair of ducks and two fat hens, seated side by side in abject quiet; others with a couple of geese, which every now and then become obstreperous, and receive sundry pats, and have their wings roughly tucked under them; and here, there, and everywhere, even along the pavement of the Place, stand women with shallower baskets. Some of these have picturesque gowns, striped woollen or sprigged cambric, with kerchiefs over their shoulders, and quaint, high caps. As I pass, one woman pulls aside the white-cloth covering of her basket, and shows lumps of creamy and golden butter peeping out of crumpled cabbage-leaves. There are eggs and cream-cheeses in some of the baskets. One pretty, blue-eyed girl offers me

bunches of violets and primroses, but I am afraid to stop, for the crowd closes round Angélique, and I fear to lose her as she makes her way slowly to the great stall in the centre, where a pretty blue-eyed, fair-haired girl, without any cap on her head, the belle of the market, sits in the midst of her wares.

"Dame! la mère Angèlique, but it is a pleasure to see you once more. We thought you were going to stay in England."

"Ah! but thou art welcome, my good friend"—another old dame, smiling and rosy-cheeked, toddles up, and holds up her wrinkled, brown face, so that Angélique may kiss it on both sides; "and how is it with Madame?—and hast thou news of Mees Barbare?"

"Ah! but yes, my good mother,"—Angélique looks round for me—"*tiens*, Marie Touchet, here is another English demoiselle for thee, and she is coming to see thee."

Marie Touchet looks at me, and makes me a curtsey, and then she says, politely:

"Mademoiselle does not look so like an English mees as Mees Barbare has done when first she has come to Château Fontaine. I have been told" (she looks at me doubtingly) "that English ladies always have long curls, like the curls of Mees Barbare."

I laugh, and shake my head.

"Mees Barbare does not wear long curls now, and she is very ill, so very ill, at Château Fontaine."

"Ah, mon Dieu!" the old face is so tremulous with agitation that her gold earrings quiver like a leaf, and I see tears springing into her faded blue eyes; "is it then possible, is Mademoiselle quite sure?" And then, reading confirmation in Angélique's saddened face, "Ah! but it is very sad, that fair, beautiful young lady, as gay as a bird, to think that she should be ill, and I have been hoping so often—oh!

so very often, Mademoiselle, to see her once more!"

"Angélique,"—I take her by the arm, for a fresh group of muslin-bordered faces had collected round the tall, erect figure—"why cannot this dear old woman come up to Château Fontaine and see Mrs. Dayrell?"

Angélique smiles, and Marie Touchet laughs heartily. I feel almost provoked with this sweet-looking old woman, for being able to cry and laugh on such short notice.

"Mademoiselle does not, then, guess how old I am. If I live to the Saint-Jean, Mademoiselle, I shall be eighty. I come into market because it is not far to come, but my travelling days are over."

She looks so fresh and hale that it is difficult to believe in either her age or her infirmity. I wonder how she can look so cheerful. How dreadful it must be to feel even a touch of age; any weakness which

suggests that power and vigour are beginning to fail! and yet Marie Touchet smiled when she said she only gets to market now.

"Are you not very sorry?"

Marie Touchet's pale little eyes fix on me at once with a half-comic expression.

"But why should I be sorry? Mademoiselle sees it is God's will, so why should I trouble?"

"*Ah, çà, ma petite dame,* will she not buy some ducks? Feel them, then, the fat ducks!" And a basket is put down at my feet with two black and white, yellow-beaked inmates, seemingly stupefied with the noise around.

"No, no, Sophie;" and Angélique pats the duck-seller on the shoulder; "we have plenty of ducks at the Château. I must see if your mother has any cheeses of Pont-l'Evéque."

A tall old man comes pushing roughly past us; his long grey hair hangs over his

shrivelled, stern face, his ragged blouse and trousers are covered with various coloured patches, he has a sack on his shoulder, and he makes his way with a long stick.

"Who is that?" I say to Marie Touchet; "he is surely very poor."

Marie laughs.

"Not he, Mademoiselle. Pierre Drouet is ever so rich; but he is a miser, and he comes to market, not to buy, but to pick up leaves and scraps for his sack."

I want some more talk with Marie Touchet, but talk is difficult in the laughing, chattering, bargaining crowd of merry faces, amid the buying and selling, the chaffering and disputing, the praise and disparagement, of the goods in the Place; and, as I follow Angélique to the centre, I hear fragments of news interchanged.

"Dost thou know that Annette has twins?"

"Michel Lecouvreur has been named corporal."

"And the two pigs of the widow Dupont have died in one day. Ah! but it is sad for a widow to lose her pigs!"

A shrill-voiced man in a much-patched blouse shouts out from his stall in front of the Church that there are no cabbages like his in the market. By this time we have reached the large vegetable-stall, but the pretty girl has vanished therefrom. A very old, white-haired woman has taken her place among pyramids of red cabbage and bunches of silver leeks, ranged round creamy cauliflowers, set in tempting rows. The border to all, and, indeed, the chief vegetable in the market, besides the innumerable brown sacks of potatoes and onions, is a profusion of cabbages. Bunches of white and pale-purple Spanish radish give a variety here and there, and so do little heaps of white satin-skinned beans, and long, trailing, yellow feathers

of *barbe-de-capucin*, and bunches of broad-leaved endive and lettuce. I had no idea that vegetables could be made to look so pretty. There are a few pumpkins, and some baskets of apples; but these occupy a small space compared with the vegetables.

I compliment the old woman on the arrangement of her stall; she laughs, and shows a mouth empty of teeth.

"Is it, then, pretty? *Ma foi!* I am glad that it gives pleasure to Mademoiselle. But Mademoiselle knows that it is quite as easy to make things pretty as ugly. Pretty things are most attractive, and it is not only I who think so."

Here she shoots a comical glance at Angélique and bursts out laughing.

"Bonjour, Monsieur Poireau," says Angélique.

She is curtseying to a tall, overdressed young man, who evidently thinks himself very handsome. But, in spite of his

shining black whiskers and gorgeous neck-tie, Monsieur Alphonse Poireau looks shy and ill at ease when he meets the gaze of the laughing old face behind the vegetables.

"*Tenez*, Madame Chéron;" he looks straight into the cabbages. "I may be mistaken, but it appears to me that the grand-daughter of Marie Touchet is not in the market this morning."

Madame Chéron shoots another glance at Angélique, and her old double chin waggles with delight.

"Aha, mon beau Monsieur, there are others with sharper eyes than you. The little Fifine has been here two hours and more; why, she kept my stall for a good half hour. *Tiens!* it is not many minutes since I saw her start to go home on her donkey, with one truss of straw in front and another behind. Monsieur Alphonse gives an uneasy start. "Ha! ha! I am seventy-six, Monsieur Alphonse, but, you

see, I keep my eyes open, and——"

"But—pardon if I interrupt you, Madame—but which way did Mademoiselle Fifine go? Did she take the lower or the upper road to St. Arnould?"

"*Ciel!* What a pity!" She laughs merrily. "I would have remarked, if I had thought Monsieur would be so anxious. But never mind. We will ask Monsieur Léon Leroux, when he comes back, for he was going the same way with Fifine."

There is a little chorus of laughter round the stall; even Angélique smiles at Monsieur Poireau's look of annoyance as he turns away; but she shakes her head at the mischievous old vegetable-seller.

"Ah, Madame Chéron, you are hard on the poor youth. Remember, his father is as rich as Leroux, and he cannot understand why little Fifine should prefer an ugly man like Monsieur Léon."

"I agree with Fifine," says the naughty

old woman; then, with a mischievous look at me, "Would not Mademoiselle prefer a plain lover, who thought only of her, to a handsome lover who was taken up with his own face. Ah, yes, there is no doubt it is not a man's face that a girl cares for."

She shrugs her shoulders, and goes on selling her cabbages.

CHAPTER IV.

A MYSTERY.

WHEN we reached the inn, we found that the *table-d'hôte* was overcrowded, and breakfast had been set for us by ourselves in a small sitting-room.

"This room is more *comme il faut* for Mademoiselle," the tall, rigid-looking mistress said, and she looked as if she remembered me. Angélique smiled and thanked her, but I was disappointed; I thought it would have been very amusing to see so many French people together. It was the same inn I had gone to with Captain Brand—how long ago that time seemed!

However, we had not long to stay there, for Angélique was in a hurry to get to her charge, and we drove home at a quicker rate than we had come. Madame Vagnon passed us on the way, but she was alone this time; she called out to Angélique that she had left Henriette in Caubebec.

"I should like to see Henriette again," I said, as Madame Vagnon drove into the orchard of La Maison Blanche. "She looks as if she had a story in her face."

"I do not think so." Angélique gave one of her provoking smiles. "I think she has only a story of patience to tell, and as she does not think she is patient, she would not talk of herself at all; she has suffered and worked hard all her life."

"And she never complains," said old Mathieu; "but perhaps"—his eyes twinkled—"if she had such rheumatism as I have, she would complain sometimes."

I ran up to Madame La Peyre's room as soon as we reached the Château. She

spent a great deal of her time in her bedroom, and I was eager to tell her about the market. It was wonderful to feel so fresh and bright from such a little change. I seemed to have so much to tell.

Madame La Peyre listened and smiled, and finally laughed heartily when I came to the discomfiture of Monsieur Alphonse Poireau. But she was not like herself; she was so guarded, and her words seemed to be studied. She has never been quite as she used to be since Captain Brand went away.

"Are they gone?" I said; "and how did poor Mrs. Dayrell bear the parting?"

Madame La Peyre sighed. "Henri has gone, and Barbara has borne his going away better than we feared she would bear it, but my brother says there will be a reaction; he is with her now."

"Monsieur l'Abbé is with her! I thought he was to go with Mr. Dayrell!"

I spoke impulsively; I was so very much

surprised at this sudden change of plans. Only yesterday Madame La Peyre had said that it would be cruel to let Mr. Dayrell travel by himself. As I looked at her I saw Madame La Peyre avoid my eyes, and a look of confusion spread over her face.

"The Abbé is here, my child," she repeated, "and he is with my poor Barbara."

I do not know why this should have troubled me so much, but it did. Madame La Peyre was not changeable, and I should have thought the Abbé still less so, and I had heard him say that his presence in Paris was necessary.

I did not see him till dinner-time, and then he was in a provokingly formal mood. I knew that he was thinking of something else each time that he spoke to me. Madame tried to be gay and pleasant, but her cheerfulness was forced.

Every moment strengthened in me the feeling that something was going wrong, that both the Abbé and Madame La Peyre

were keeping some secret from me. All at once the Abbé roused himself and turned to me.

"Mademoiselle Gertrude,"—whenever the Abbé smiles in that bland, formal way at me, I feel rebellious, as if I were being managed—"it appears that you have much liked our market."

"Yes, Monsieur, and I should like to go again; or, perhaps, I would rather go and see Mademoiselle Henriette, and Marie Touchet, and that dear old Madame Chéron."

"Yes, certainly—" the courteous old gentleman gave me an approving look, which I felt to be undeserved—"it would be very kind."

"Pardon, Monsieur; but I believe I only wish to see them for my own amusement. I like to be amused, and Henriette interests me, and Marie puzzles me, and Madame Chéron makes me laugh."

He looked touched, and he spoke in his old fatherly manner.

"Yes, my child, you are right; and you want all these things to occupy your mind. This is a very sad house just now for a young girl. What do you say to a journey up the Seine to Dieppedale? Madame La Peyre's cousin lives in a charming country house beside the river; and, if you are willing, I think the change would do you both good."

I looked quickly at Madame La Peyre. It had struck me at once that it would be strange for her to leave Château Fontaine while Mrs. Dayrell continued so ill; and I saw a trouble in her face. What was all this unspoken mystery, which I was now sure concerned me, or why should they wish to take me from Château Fontaine? I felt ready to say that I must know the meaning of it; that I specially disliked mysteries: and then I checked myself in confusion. What right had I to dislike mysteries, who

had only so lately given up a lengthened-out deceit? A passionate longing came to me to throw my arms round Madame La Peyre and tell her all that had happened between me and Captain Brand.

Till now such a confession has seemed impossible; but something has changed the light in which I regarded her. Either the restraint that has grown up in our former easy intercourse has surrounded her with greater dignity, or the new light in which I see myself changes the light in which I see others; but to-day, as I sit looking at Madame La Peyre's sweet, troubled face, I begin to think I have been presumptuous, and that if I had relied more on her guidance, and less on my own, I should have acted more wisely; so that my rebellious feelings slip away under this rising wave of tenderness, and I say gently—

"If Madame wishes me to go, I should like it."

"Merci, ma bonne amie! Tears spring

into her sweet old dark eyes, and she puts out her hand to me as I sit near her at table. "Then, Père Alphonse, I will write to Cécile, and tell her to expect us the day after to-morrow."

"The day after to-morrow will be Monday, and the boat does not leave Hâvre for Rouen till Tuesday," the Abbé says. "You had better say you will be at Dieppedale on Tuesday evening, Eugénie."

"Bien," says Madame La Peyre, and she rises from table. The passages were dark at Château Fontaine, for the oil-lamp in the middle of the hall burned dimly, and did not cast much light up the square well and the gallery which surrounded it; and although the days were lengthening, still at seven o'clock there was little daylight left. As we grope our way up the broad staircase, I put my arm round Madame La Peyre's waist, and kiss her on both cheeks.

"I am so glad," I whisper "that I am going to get you all to myself."

"Thou dear sweet child," she answers as she returns my kisses. We were passing Mrs. Dayrell's door.

"My poor Barbara," she said with a sigh.

"Yes, yes," I said, "it is very selfish of me; but, Madame, do not let us go away if it makes you anxious to leave her."

She went on to the salon, and when we reached the door she said,

"We will not stay away long, and we are not going far, and Angélique is more necessary to Barbara than I am; and besides, my dear child, I will not deceive thee—I cannot explain it to thee—but it is necessary that I should take thee away at once from Château Fontaine."

"Necessary! Why? Oh, Madame, will you not tell me? Is it because you fear I shall be foolish and self-willed? I do not wonder; I have wanted to tell you how sorry I am for all my folly."

I had nestled my head on her shoulder; it was so much easier to tell her with both

my arms round her, and my face hidden.

"Come in here," she said gently, and she closed the salon door upon us; "do not distress thyself, my Gertrude. I cannot explain, I must not."

"No, no, and it does not distress me to say this; it makes me happier. Of course I should like best to know what all this means, but I want to try and show you that I am in earnest, and that I will be guided by you; only if you really prefer not to leave Mrs Dayrell, I promise to do just what you tell me, if you will only trust me."

I felt a choking come into my voice, and I stopped, for I wanted to be calm and reasonable; but Madame La Peyre was far more agitated than I was.

"My poor dear tormented child; my dear little one"—she kissed me tenderly, and I felt the tears on her cheeks—"I trust thee entirely; if it were only for *thee* we need not go away from Château Fontaine; but

—Ah, mon Dieu!—kiss me, child, and let me go to Barbara, or I shall say the very thing I ought to keep silent about."

CHAPTER V.

BY MOONLIGHT.

WHEN I got to my room that night I was too much excited to sleep. I had seen no more of Madame La Peyre during the evening. The Abbé brought me a message that his sister had found Mrs. Dayrell restless, and would stay beside her till she fell asleep, but that I was not to sit up.

"And indeed," the courteous old gentleman went on to say, "after such a fatiguing day, my dear child, you require extra sleep, or we shall have you lose some of your brightness."

This sounded like a dismissal, so I said good night, and departed.

No wonder that Mrs. Dayrell was restless; the night was very wild. The wind went howling round the Château like a lioness robbed of her young one; the moon, nearly at the full, gave only a fitful light, so quickly were the lines of black cloud whirled across its pale surface. I sat down at my window and watched it—sometimes veiled in a film of gauzy black, sometimes with dark cloud-lines drawn across its disk—far more interesting than when its cold calm outline showed undisturbed.

The trees waved wildly, the young larches bent beneath the gusts as if they would touch the ground. I heard a sharp cry, "Tu-whit, tu-whit, tu-whit," and then a huge monster, with wide-stretched wings, swooped past the moon, and circled round the angle of the house, as if it were weaving spells.

I felt in harmony with this tumult

outside the house. The day had been so full of incident and variety, so totally different from all the months of quiet days that had gone before, that it seemed as if I could not shake off the excitement. One face after another passed before me, till my brain felt like a kaleidoscope of constantly changing and broken pictures. First came Fifine and her two lovers. I wish I had seen Léon Leroux, who loves the pretty girl so much, and whom she loves better than that conceited Monsieur Poireau. A warm flush rises in my cheeks. Are all Frenchmen vain? I know I thought Eugène was a little—just a very little—but then the Abbé even is rather vain, and so was Mr. Newton—perhaps all men are vain. No, they are not, I answer myself quite angrily. No, Captain Brand is not the least bit vain—he never thinks of himself at all.

With the thought of Captain Brand comes a sudden new idea. Is it he who

is coming to Château Fontaine, and does he so shrink from me that it is considered advisable to take me away? The thought is so intensely humbling that I crouch down in my white dimity-covered chair and hide my eyes with my hands. I forget the clouded moon and the whirling tree-branches; even the sweeping owl, though its sharp cry still reaches my ears. Oh! what can I do to make him see that I am sorry—that I am not really so unworthy as he thinks? But that is the doubt. Am I not still unworthy? I may have passed through a change of feeling, but that may be only self-imaginings and morbidity. I have done nothing since I saw him to prove my repentance for all that foolish deceit.

I get up and look out of window. I so long to find something I can do, that outward movement is a relief. How the clouds have gathered since I looked; the moon has so much higher that I see far off the silver

risen sheen of the river; above is a black rough mass of clouds, and now a broad line of black stretches across the sky, and, curving upward in the centre of the moon, sits brooding like a monstrous bat, half obscuring its light. Above the black lowering cloud the sky is a mottled mass of grey and silver. How immense is all this beauty!—I feel an atom as I think how many millions are perhaps gazing at the marvellous sight. As I sit gazing all this changes, the black swooping bat-pinions sail away, the heavy mass spreads and lightens and sinks below the moon, and as it sinks, its edges whiten and then glow like burnished copper; only for a while, and then a fleecy, paler cloud-wreath obscures the moon, the sky above is a clear dark blue, with stars gemming it at intervals, and below there is a quiet range of grey, which seems to say the storm has passed over us.

I kneel down and say my prayers, and

when I rise up I feel calmer, but still very sleepless. I am quite resigned to do whatever Madame La Peyre wishes, but still, for all that, I cannot help wanting to know why we are going away. That thought about Captain Brand was only a folly; because, of course, the Abbé could easily have met him in Paris. Oh! I see it now. How dull I was not to guess instantly; the blood rushes up to my forehead, and sets my heart beating with excitement. It is Eugène de Vaucresson who is expected to arrive at Château Fontaine.

I walk up and down my room faster and faster. I cannot think; the torrent of contradictory feeling that swells in my heart confuses me. All the good resolutions, all the patience and self-control I have been trying so hard for, are swept away by a sudden flood of youth and joyful gladness. I shall be young again now. Ah! yes, he is so young that he will understand me, and I shall be happy once more.

Why, I am happy already! Much of this sadness and heaviness has come because I have been living with old people; there can never be full sympathy while there is this difference in age.

My heart smites me hard in the midst of this burst of joy. Who could have shown me myself so truly without being in full sympathy with me. Am I going to prove myself worthy towards Captain Brand by ingratitude to all those who have borne with me so patiently? Am I going to be what I have been so often—resolute only in theory? No, I will not be ungrateful.

I sit thinking a long, long time. At last I hear the old clock outside strike twelve. The moon has sunk; there is no light now, and I feel a sudden chill of terror. I grope to my table, but I cannot find the matches directly; and when I do find them, and strike a light, I am standing just in front of a tall mirror, and I start back with a cry at the sight of my own white face.

When both my candles are lighted I feel wonderfully soothed; there is a very calming influence in light—a sort of common-sense reasoning comes with it, which seems to depart in the darkness. But I am not easy in this joy; I know now why this uneasiness came with the happier feelings, I learned it while I sat waiting in the darkness.

I will be very frank with Eugène. I will tell him that I had no thought of loving him—I only thought of him as a friend, till that sad, foolish moment when he put it into my head. But he is not to blame, because he thought I was free, and I do not suppose I ever should have cared so much for him, if he had not written me those letters. But if I was wrong to receive them—and I have grown to believe that I was wrong—then I shall be equally wrong if I let Eugène talk of love to me till I am free of this marriage. I cannot help caring for him, and thinking of him;

that may be wrong too, but I cannot help it. And yet I feel so shy and timid at the thought of meeting him, that I am anxious to leave Château Fontaine. Captain Brand has said, no doubt, that Eugène and I are not to meet. Well, he might have trusted me—at least, I think so. I do not fancy this shrinking can be a mere imagination. But I can go to bed now. I have made up my mind what to do, and I think I shall sleep.

This resolution is, perhaps, no self-denial to me; but still it will certainly vex Eugène, when he knows it, and make him very angry; and it will be very painful to make him angry, when he loves me so dearly, poor dear fellow! I must try to bear his anger. At least, this is something I can do for Captain Brand, but I scarcely know how it is to be done.

I have not answered Eugène's last letter, or written to him about his mother's

death. I cannot; and now there will be no chance of seeing him. I suppose, as Angélique says, I must be patient.

CHAPTER VI.

A VISITOR.

IT is only a fortnight ago since I sat watching the moon and the black clouds that hurled themselves across its light. Were those clouds dumb heralds of the sorrow and trouble that were coming? Till to-day, I have not felt able to set down a word of what has happened at Château Fontaine, and, as I look back over the days, some of them seem as far off already as though a year had come between.

That Sunday was a bright day, full of pleasant anticipation. As we came home from church, Madame La Peyre told me

about her friend's charming villa at Dieppedale, just a little way beyond Canteleu, which is famous for its view of the city of Rouen. I had a longing to see Rouen, and I wondered whether the quiet old lady of Dieppedale ever drove so far.

"She will love thee dearly, Gertrude, because thou art English," Madame said, as we climbed the steep hill again. "She was an *émigrée*, and she has never forgotten the kindness she received in England."

I had not paid a visit of this kind before, and in the afternoon I lay in wait for Angélique on the stairs, to consult her about my wardrobe.

There is a room at the end of that long narrow passage leading off from the hall, which is called Angélique's room, but she is never in it. Twice, when I have gone to seek her there, I have found Rosalie knitting a long blue stocking, and looking as malevolent as a witch in her cell.

At last Mrs. Dayrell's door opened, and

Angélique came out. She put up a warning finger directly she saw me, and her face was even more sad than it usually is when she leaves her patient. She turned at once to my bedroom—she seems always to know my wants.

"Mademoiselle is not to trouble about her packing," she said, holding the door open for me; "if she will just put out her books, or anything she wants specially, the rest will be ready."

But she did not smile, and she seemed anxious to leave me.

"What is it?—is Mrs. Dayrell worse?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, I am afraid she is worse; there is a great change, and I cannot soothe her. I am going to find Monsieur l'Abbé; my poor Madame reproaches herself for letting Monsieur Dayrell go; she says he must be brought back at once."

"But, Angélique, we cannot go away, if she is worse; it would be dreadful te

leave her. I will go and tell Madame La Peyre."

Angélique shook her head.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle, but it is always best to let things be. Mademoiselle is not to go till Tuesday, and we do not know what may happen before Tuesday."

She went away, and I sat with those words echoing in my ears, "We do not know what may happen before Tuesday." And yet I have remarked that, as a rule, when one feels a dread, or what one calls a presentiment of evil, it is groundless. I said this to myself, and went back again to the thought of our journey.

In the evening, Madame told me Mrs. Dayrell was better.

"I think the stormy wind last night troubled her, and we must expect that in her state she will feel her husband's absence. I am sorry he went"—her sweet old face clouded over—"I think he did my poor Barbara much more good than

any doctor will ever do her; but she wished it, and he thought it would please her to see an English doctor."

"I suppose I must not go to her?"

"No"—Madame La Peyre spoke with unusual quickness—"no, my dear child; Barbara is too fond of talking to thee, and she always excites herself when she sees thee; thou art much more lively and entertaining, my little one, than Angélique and I are, and therefore not so harmless for our invalid."

I felt disappointed. I wished much to see Mrs. Dayrell, if it were only to efface the remembrance of her sad wild face, and of those despairing words. I wonder why I linger over all these trivialities? I believe because I dread to put down deliberately the story of the next day. The Monday which was to work such a change in my life.

When I woke up and looked out, there was a soft mist over everything. The fine

tracery of the topmost tree-branches peered over the mist like phantoms, their trunks and lower branches being as yet shrouded in its veil. As it cleared away, the sun shone out brilliantly, and there was that soft sweetness in the air which seems to make one feel happy and languid all at once, and which only comes with the first burst of Spring.

Directly I was ready, I ran downstairs, and very soon I had gathered a large handful of violets; the shrubbery was purple with their exquisite flowers and buds hiding away among the leaves; there were lilies of the valley, too, not in blossom, but their lovely leaves looked fresh and delicate against the rich brown mould.

I gathered some of these leaves, and put them round my violets, but they did not suit them, and I threw them away. There is no use in mismatching things, I thought; nature always knows what will go well together—it is only man who makes mis-

takes. I began to wonder if nature meant to match Mr. and Mrs. Dayrell; certainly they are not a well-suited pair—she ought to have a phlegmatic husband, who would laugh at her caprices; and he ought to have a sweeter, gentler wife. Marriage seems to be a great, an awful puzzle—I mean the matching of husband and wife—and I thought of my father and my mother, who had married for love, and yet who always looked sad and anxious. Had not my mother said they had been selfish in marrying?

I walked slowly up from the shrubbery towards the house, and I went in and sat on the lowest step of the broad staircase, to make up my violets into bunches.

Presently, Rosalie passed across the hall. She stopped and looked at me, but I took no notice.

"Mam'selle should not sit on the stairs —there are visitors arriving."

She stood looking at me through her

light eyelashes, with her hands spread out on her lips. I thought she was only teasing me, and went on picking out the largest blossoms for a special offering to Madame La Peyre; and then, all in a moment, I heard footsteps crunching on the ground outside.

Rosalie said, "Mam'selle— Mam'selle Stewart, they are coming, there is no time to lose." And I found myself running upstairs with my lap full of flowers.

Instead of going on to my own room, I stopped at the Abbé's study, and tapped at the door.

"Entrez," in Madame La Peyre's voice. She and the Abbé were standing near the fire-place, and I fancied they looked disturbed.

"Pardon," I said; and then I kissed Madame, and shook hands with the Abbé. I made a movement to the door. "I thought no one would be here; but I brought my violets away, because

some one is coming up the terrace."

"Do not disturb thyself, *ma petite*—it is probably the postman, earlier than usual." Madame La Peyre smiled, but the Abbé looked grave.

"I will see," he said. "You can stay here till I come back."

Then in a moment I knew what was going to happen. Light seemed to dance before my eyes as Rosalie threw open the door, crying out, in her shrill tones, "Monsieur le Comte de Vaucresson."

The Abbé stood still in the middle of the room; but Madame La Peyre gave a little cry, and started up, with both hands stretched out towards the as yet unseen visitor. He looked so very pale, his beard was so much grown, that I should not have known him except for his eyes; and, somehow, these looked so much older, so changed, that, instead of the companion of my own age I had parted from with such loving sadness, it seemed to me here

was a grown-up gentleman, of whom I felt alarmingly shy.

The Abbé and he embraced, and then the Comte took both Madame La Peyre's hands, bowed profoundly over them, and kissed them. I had never taken my eyes from Eugène; but now, as he looked full at me, I could hardly look back—I felt my face burn, and my eyes drooped.

The Comte did not attempt to shake hands, he only made me a low formal bow, and murmured some words—one of which sounded like "Madame."

"Ah, my dear friend," the Abbé said quickly, "a letter from me has crossed you; a few days and I should have met you in Paris."

Madame La Peyre looked at me, and moved to the door.

"You must have so much to say to my brother, Monsieur Eugène, that we will leave you in peace."

He opened the door, I gave just a little

look up as I went out, and I met his eyes full; I hurried on, past Madame La Peyre, I wanted to reach my own room, but she called me back.

"Gertrude, my child, let us go down to breakfast at once. The Abbé wishes to be alone with his pupil, and we shall have finished before they come."

"In a moment," I said. I had let fall most of my violets, but I still kept a bunch which wanted tying. I was going off to my room with these. I thought Madame La Peyre cruel to ask me to come to eat when I was choking with pent-up feelings. To my surprise she said,

"I will wait for thee," and she stood still in the gallery.

I had no time to think. I felt hot one minute, and cold the next. I began to guess that the Abbé had written to tell Eugène not to come, and that he had come in spite of this. He had come because he so longed to see me.

His eyes had told me that as I came out of the room, and instead of feeling proud and happy—for he, poor dear fellow, knows no reason why all is not as it used to be—I only felt frightened, and was glad to get away.

Well, he is here; we must see one another again, and we must come to some sort of explanation, and I shall be thankful when it is over.

"You need not wait, Mathieu," says Madame La Peyre as soon as we are half through breakfast, and that grinning piece of laziness disappears, probably to sleep till his next summons.

"My dear Gertrude," Madame speaks gravely, "thou art not eating; I suppose thou art mystified. I had better say that Eugène de Vaucresson's arrival is unexpected, he ought not to have come here, and my brother will send him away as soon as possible. It is useless to treat thee like a child, my little one, and therefore I tell

thee that it is thought better that Eugène should not see thee again."

I felt myself crimson in an instant. "Madame, I know I have not deserved to be trusted; but I cannot understand this; surely if I say you can trust me now you will believe."

My voice quivered; I could hardly keep from crying. Madame La Peyre looked troubled and disappointed. I went on as soon as I could speak steadily.

"I will tell you everything, and then you will see that I ought to see Eu—— Monsieur de Vaucresson again. You know we care for one another." The look of pain in her eyes was not to be borne, and I covered mine with my hands; I felt as if I must hide my face while I spoke. "I have learned to see that I was wrong in beginning this; but then I am not sure that one can guide one's own feelings. It seems to me this feeling came of itself; but it is done, and I am resolved not to consi-

der myself engaged, or free to listen to Monsieur de Vaucresson, until Captain Brand tells me he has got our marriage set aside. You know, I suppose, that he wishes to be released as much as I do."

Madame La Peyre gave a weary little sigh.

"Yes, yes, he told me so—" there was a sound of irritation in her voice that I had never heard there before. "I have promised not to interfere; but it is all very unreasonable, and I cannot explain to thee why it would be so much better if the Captain had left things as they were. Thou art only a child still, and, mon Dieu, a child's faults should be forgiven and forgotten."

In the midst of my excitement I could hardly help smiling. This was then the secret cause of Madame La Peyre's indulgence. She considered that Captain Brand had been harsh in his decision; she did not really believe I could wish to be free.

"If thou wert a Catholic, my child, it would be almost impossible to set this marriage aside; but in thy country it may be different. Still thou must not have anything to do with Monsieur de Vaucresson even after—"

Here she stopped in a most provoking manner.

"I have told you everything, Madame; would it not be better to trust me?"

She shook her head so sadly, and her dear eyes filled so quickly, that I was appeased.

"I cannot, dear little one—indeed I cannot. My Gertrude, if thou askest me any more questions, I may perhaps break my promise to my brother, the Abbé."

I kissed her. "I will not ask one more question;" but I felt tortured, and my face must have shown her my trouble.

"We will go away now, Gertrude," she said, "we will stay in my room till after-

noon, and I will ask if thou mayest not write thy explanation; but indeed, my sweet child, thou must not see Eugène de Vaucresson again."

CHAPTER VII.

AN EXPLANATION AT LAST.

A STRANGE change had come to me. Had I lost the power of feeling? I had been longing for months to see Eugène, and I had seen him. He was actually under the same roof with me, and yet I could bear to be separated from him, and to be told that I must not see him again.

Perhaps I did not fully believe Madame La Peyre—perhaps I hoped that the Abbé would give a different judgment. Either this hope sustained me, or the suddenness of our meeting had dulled my perceptions.

Madame La Peyre volunteered to shew me a new open stitch in her embroidery,

and I was able to listen, and even to learn.

At last came Angélique's well-known tap at the door, and when she came in she said,

"Monsieur l'Abbé will be glad to see Madame, and afterwards to read with Ma. demoiselle."

"Is Monsieur le Comte gone then?" Madame asked eagerly.

"*Mais oui*, Madame—" Angélique's eyebrows were lifted in surprise—"it is nearly an hour since Monsieur l'Abbé has gone down to the gates with Monsieur de Vaucresson."

"*Allons*," said Madame La Peyre; "but, Gertrude, I am not sure about the reading, thou art so pale; a run in the park would be more pleasant, would it not, my child?"

"No, thank you"—I had resolved to see the Abbé—"when your talk is over, I will go to the study."

"*Bien*," and it seemed to me that she tripped away, as if she were eager to learn all that had been happening.

I had been wishing to be left alone, for my head felt dazed, and I gave a sigh of relief as Madame departed, followed by Angélique, but almost at once a sort of despair seized me.

All is then ended. I am parted from Eugène, for even if Captain Brand succeeds in getting the marriage set aside, I cannot seek Eugène, and he is forbidden to come to Château Fontaine.

There seems to be an inexorable fate at work. Just in this same iron manner I was prevented from speaking to Captain Brand; he will never know how I long for his forgiveness, or how sorry I am; and yet I am only sorry that I was ungrateful and deceitful; if all were to happen over again I think I must love Eugène, and feel only friendship for Captain Brand. It is all very well for people who marry just because they are bidden to take a husband—whose pulses have never been stirred by any quicker current than the throbs of gratified

vanity—to say I could have loved Captain Brand if I had chosen. I do not believe in that sort of manufactured love; it seems to me that real love is spontaneous, and comes direct from Heaven.

I set down these thoughts, because they remain so vividly in memory; they were just the last I had before the trial came which I so shrink from writing of, and yet it is a cowardly shrinking. I suppose it is much easier to confess that one has been faulty than that one has been self-deceived.

As I recovered from the shock of Eugène's sudden departure, I began to realise my disappointment. How many words I had planned to say; how often I had gone over in thought the scene of our meeting; and how different all had been! It seems as if Angélique's theory is true—that all the events of our lives are pre-ordered for us; that we are only left free to choose good and evil as they present themselves. In this way I certainly might have insisted on

seeing Eugène again. I feel I have behaved like a coward, and the torment gnaws at my heart. Madame La Peyre is right; I shall go out.

I go very slowly and sadly to my room for my hat and cloak. All the bright morning promise has faded out of the sky—light grey clouds sail swiftly across, and join a huge bank which sits lowering on the tree-tops. There will be rain before this afternoon is over, but I am glad to see the dulness; all that I used to prize so much —brightness, and colour, and beauty—have gone out of my life.

I have never found the spring in the bookcase, but I have found out a way to the foot of that dark staircase, and my mind is so full of Eugène that I go there involuntarily. The ugly pigs, and the cocks and hens, are still in the yard, and Rosalie is throwing grain to them. How differently different women can do the same thing! Rosalie's atmosphere seems to in-

fluence the dumb creatures, but it is quite another influence to her mother's. At Merdon the pigs used to frolic about with their tails in a coil. Here they are snarling and trying to bite, and the fowls do not come clucking round Rosalie's feet, they rush greedily in search of every stray grain. It is possible that the creatures are not as well fed at Château Fontaine as at Merdon. The pigs look gaunt and wretched, but I like to think of Rosalie as an emblem of discord. She sets my teeth on edge. I try to pass her silently.

"*Eh bien*, Mademoiselle, Monsieur le Comte has not paid a long visit. Mademoiselle is the only visitor who stays at Château Fontaine; the gentlemen all go away. It is dull for Mademoiselle to live with only the old—is it not so?"

"Please to help me open this gate." I did not choose to answer, her voice and her looks were both spiteful. She plainly rejoiced in my dulness. I believe far more

in the old fairy tales since I have seen Rosalie. She is so like a wicked fairy. She seems to hate everything that is young and bright.

I had not been this way since the burst of Spring came. When I reached the opening in the hedge of the little Dutch garden, and looked down on the hanging wood, and at the trees across the river, I saw how great a change had passed, and was still passing, over all. The tender green leaves unrolled themselves under my very eyes, and one heard the soft indefinable sound of dropping sheaths. It was too early in the day for the evening song of the birds, but the air was full of murmur. Some of the flower-beds in the garden were empty of all but rich brown mould, and standard rose-trees, gemmed with delicate red-stemmed leaves, in the centre; others were gay with red and yellow tulips, and some were full of basil and other sweet herbs. The high hedge

went all round the garden, shutting it in completely from the long stretch of potatoe and cabbage ground which lay between it and the offices of the Château, but there were no trees this way, and I turned again to the woods. There was something healing to my trouble in the exquisite tender green, in the visible gush of renewed life. Far below, the river-bank opposite was gemmed with wild-flowers, and beyond these was a carpet of rich golden blossoms, sitting on dark green leaves.

How lovely it all was, and how little did any dweller at Château Fontaine seem to care for its loveliness—it was deserted. It has always been a mystery to me how the garden and shrubberies were kept in order—they seemed so solitary. Mathieu was far too lazy to handle a rake, and there were only his father, the concierge, and a still older man —Baptiste—attached to the place. Baptiste was so deaf that, after one vain attempt to make him hear, I had given up

any effort at speech, and I contented myself with nodding and smiling, if by chance I saw him at work.

As I stood looking down at the wood, I saw something moving through it. Some one was coming up the path. It might be Baptiste; but as I looked I saw that the branches were moved too roughly and rapidly for the old man's leisurely progress. Whoever was coming, came at full speed. My heart began to beat fast—I hardly know why. In a minute the trees near the top were pushed violently apart, and I saw that it was Eugène. He was flushed, and his eyes sparkled with eagerness.

"My charming friend, you knew I was not gone. Is it not so?"

He came up close beside me, and took my hand and kissed it. All my shyness came back, and I shrank a little away from him.

"We cannot talk here, my Gertrude," he said; "we are sure to be interrupted.

The wood on the other side is much better; come."

The mention of that wood brought back vividly my meeting with Captain Brand. I could not go and talk there with Eugène —and with this recollection came back too my resolution. But why need I keep it? I had spoken of it to Madame La Peyre, but I had made no pledge to Captain Brand. Why should I dash away the happiness of two people? My head felt in a whirl. All I had been striving so hard for grew unreal and impossible; all that had seemed impossible was real and irresistible. Standing there beside Eugène, he seemed to absorb my will—I felt in that moment that I must let him decide my fate.

I looked up at him; and there happened what has always been to me the strangest event in my life. I have never understood how I could have learned it so quickly, but in one instant I knew that I was not look-

ing at *my* Eugène—at the idol of my dreams. I shivered and drew my hand away, and then I looked again. What was the change? It was the same face; there was the same lovely hair curling over his white forehead, the same haughty, graceful pose of the head. He had more beard, and this, doubtless, changed him; but the change in his eyes was something quite different. They were—— I cannot find words to paint the change I felt. I could not keep mine fixed on them: their look brought the blood into my face.

"Do you not think so?" he said softly; and then I understood he was waiting for my answer.

"We can talk here very well, I think; we shall not be interrupted." I summoned up my courage, and tried to remember that I had longed for this meeting, here was the opportunity I had desired. "I am glad you are come; I wanted to see you very much. I was so unhappy when they said you were gone."

I spoke earnestly, but I did not look up. I longed to get rid of this nightmare feeling of repulsion; this was surely the Eugène I had been cherishing in my heart; I wanted to believe against myself.

"My sweet friend,"—Ah, me! at the sound of his voice hope came back. Yes, in this he was Eugène; no one else had ever spoken to me in tones that stole into my heart and set it throbbing wildly—"you give me a pleasure I hardly dared to hope for. When I saw you this morning, I almost feared I was forgotten."

"No—oh, no! You thought so because I did not write in answer to your last letter; but I will tell you all about that. That is one reason why I so much wished to see you."

I spoke very earnestly, but he laughed.

"Dear Gertrude," he said, so very tenderly that the tears came against my will, "never mind the letter; we will forget all but our love. We are together at last.

I knew you would come; I have been waiting in the wood this hour for you."

I started at this.

"Why, could you not have insisted on seeing me at the Château?" I said, gravely.

I was glad of an excuse for speaking. I wanted him to understand that I did not mean to keep this meeting secret. I looked up, and saw that he was smiling.

"My sweet little friend, they have been moping you. Tell me now—I promise to be discreet—have not Madame and that dragon of virtue, la mére Angélique, been trying to make you into a *femme raisonnable?* I know you have been *triste à mourir* in that dreadful Devonshire." He said the word so prettily that I could not help laughing. "Yes, yes, but that is finished; now that the dear little victim has her Eugène again, she will forget these foolish worries, and be gay and charming as she was last year."

I shook my head.

"You cannot think how long ago last year seems, so much has happened since then," I said. Somehow I could not feel at ease or happy, and I saw that my grave manner vexed him. "You must be patient with me," I went on, "I cannot feel natural till I have explained everything."

He gave a little impatient frown, and shrugged his shoulders.

"My friend, it is the English blood which torments you; in France, when we have a trouble or a grief, we do not brood over it and hatch it into more stinging life; we turn from it, we try to shake it off, we flee it as we would flee from a serpent. Life is too short for long sorrows. I come to you to-day for distraction, for amusement, for love; why, then, should we explain anything, and why should you wrinkle your charming forehead in trying to tell me anything, but that you love me—that is all I want to hear, dear Gertrude; your eyes say so, and I want to hear your words confirm it. Come, we will go and find the

boat, and we will be as joyous as we were last year."

While I listened I kept changing; I did not like his words, he seemed so frivolous; the idea of shrinking from grief shocked me, and the next moment I felt full of remorse, for I could not do as he had asked me; I could not say I loved him. I was growing colder and colder. "Be as joyous as we were last year," when Eugène seemed to me perfection? Impossible! What was coming to me? Ah, it was I that had changed. And then I told myself it was the false position in which I stood that made him seem different, and that I must be brave, and tell him the truth at once. I must not let him talk to me in this way."

"Please listen—" I looked at him very entreatingly, and he bent down and whispered fond nonsense about my eyes, which I knew it was wrong to listen to; "let me speak. I cannot go in the boat to-day, and

you will see why. Has the Abbé told you anything about me?"

He smiled, and bowed.

"Not anything that I did not know before, Madame?"

I felt my face flush suddenly.

"Why do you call me Madame?"

"Is it not the truth?" he said in English.

"Yes; but how did you know it?—it is what I wanted to tell you; until I—" I stopped here, a strange mixture of feelings checked my words.

Eugène took my hand and kissed it. I felt angry, and I hastily drew it away.

"Ah!" he said sadly, "you are offended, and you will not let me be happy; dear Gertrude, you are unkind, and you are my only friend; you know my sorrow; ah! how hard is then your heart! I came to you to be cheered and consoled, and you treat me like a criminal; what have I done that I may not love you as I loved you last year?"

"I am very sorry for your loss—indeed I am, but it is all different; last year you thought I was free; it is not you who are to blame, it is my fault; I have no right to expect you to be better than I was then."

"My dear little friend," he said in a wearied voice—I suppose my tears troubled him—"do not be so much too earnest; life is not given that we should make ourselves miserable; we have only to enjoy; even Angélique will tell you that her *bon Dieu* likes us to be happy. You are married, it is true, but you have an old husband, who will very often be away from you, as he is a sailor; surely he is not so barbarous as to deny you the consolation of a friend."

I stared at him. Had I been mistaken all through? Was it only friendship and not love that Eugène felt for me? I do not know whether I was mortified or relieved for the first minute, and then I blushed with shame; my vanity had indeed led me into error. But a rapid thought came—if Eu-

gène only wished for my friendship, why was I not allowed to see him?

"Every woman wants a friend," he went on, "and you specially need one. I too have no friend, dear Gertrude. Consider me a little; I claim your love as a right. Remember, you have given it to me."

I looked up frankly, but I quickly looked down again; I think Eugène deceived himself about his friendship.

"Friendship and love are very different," I said, "and when you marry, your wife will not like our friendship."

"Marry!" he laughed; "my marriage is in the future, dear Gertrude. *Mon Dieu!* I shall not marry till I am older than your Captain is—not till I am grey-haired—and then my wife will be too well-bred to interfere with my friendships."

I stood silent. It is true, then, that Eugène loves me, or he would not talk in this way. I felt puzzled.

"I was married to Captain Brand against

my will," I said, "but we have agreed to set this marriage aside—we both wish to be free."

I had been half reluctant to say this. Certainly, if Eugène was as trifling as he now seemed to be, I could not love him; and yet hope kept on whispering that if he saw a chance of making me his wife, he would be once more all I had dreamed him to be.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, that is not wise. It is a mistake, dear Gertrude, to do this. I have seen more of life than you have, and those marriages are the best where the husbands and wives see least of one another. In France a marriage is a marriage always, there is no possibility of a change; and for a woman marriage is a good institution—it gives her position, and it gives her freedom. In England it may be different, but in France an unmarried girl may not have a friend who is not of her own sex; it

is 'shocking,' as you say in English."

"Then how could you ask me to—to be your friend last year?" I said, indignantly.

He tried to take my hand, but I drew it away.

"My friend, you are too hasty, and yet you look so pretty when you are angry—there, now, how shall I calm you, my sweet friend? If peaches fall at our feet, it is not robbery to pick them up; would you have had me so boorish and brutal as not to enjoy what came of itself?"

I turned away, writhing; every word was stabbing my own folly into my heart. Eugène followed me, and an earnestness came at last into the playful tone which so goaded me.

"Listen, Gertrude, my well-beloved, and do not blame yourself. You were a sweet, innocent child, and you acted like a child. When I learned the story of your marriage, I knew that you had acted rightly in thinking you were free, and, unless your

husband is a tyrant, he had no right to blame you for what you did; but now listen again. We are foolish; all this time we have been disputing, when we might have been happy talking to each other the gay nothings we talked last year. Why should we be grave and serious about trifles? Why should we trouble about this good Captain, who is safe at sea? You are free to amuse yourself—amuse yourself, then, my angel. No one at Château Fontaine has any more right to direct you than I have; and I have, have I not, dearest Gertrude, the right of love?"

He clasped my hand so firmly this time that I felt I could not draw it away without a struggle. I was desperately angry, and yet I felt as cold as marble.

"Please let me go," I said calmly; "you have shown me that you and I can never understand one another, and I am sure we must not meet again. You are not what I have thought you, but I have no

right to be angry, because I have been wrong too. Please let go my hand."

He did not answer; he kept looking towards the wood. Presently he dropped my hand with a violent exclamation.

"I told you we should be interrupted," he said, pettishly; "here comes some one; you have still time to get away, Gertrude. A—h, it is the Abbé; but he will not reach us for several minutes yet."

"I shall stay," I said coldly.

"As you will;" he shrugged his shoulders. "I should have thought it better to avoid an *esclandre*."

"You said just now I was my own mistress, and could do as I pleased. *I* have not met you purposely; why should there be an *esclandre*?"

I spoke so bitterly that he turned and looked at me.

"You are so charming," he said, "that I am sure in the end you will be guided by me. We cannot talk now. You will have a letter from me to-morrow."

"No!—no more letters; I shall not read them." I eagerly watched the movement in the trees. I had felt suffocated with anger and mortification; but all other feelings changed into thankfulness when the Abbé at last stood beside me.

He looked at us inquiringly.

"Monsieur," I said, hurriedly, "will you take me to the Château?"

"I will follow you instantly, my daughter." He gave me a grave bow, as if to dismiss me. "I want to talk to you when I have spoken to Monsieur le Comte de Vaucresson."

I did not even look at Eugène, but hurried back to the Château.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DARK HOURS.

I WENT so fast that I had not much time to think; but yet even in those few moments I had gathered that I had something to learn from the Abbé. Only he could have told Eugène the fact of my marriage; and it was his knowledge of the Count's feelings that had made him forbid our meeting. But I told myself, as I hurried through the gates, that I must not think of Eugène until I had talked with the Abbé. I felt so hard, so injured, and yet, after all, I might have wronged Eugène—I might have mistaken his meaning. At this moment I shrank from him almost with loath-

ing. Ah! I must be capricious and shallow, or I could not have changed so quickly.

I had reached the pig-yard; the gate leading into it was so very heavy that I could hardly push it open. I stood still after one effort, and then I found I was trembling violently; my knees knocked together, and I caught at the gate to save myself from falling. While I stood trying to recover my strength, Rosalie came hurrying across the yard.

"*Tiens!* how can Mademoiselle stand idle when the poor Madame is dying. I run to find Monsieur l'Abbé—my mother has need of him. Has Mademoiselle, then, seen Monsieur l'Abbé?"

"He is in the flower-garden." She had wrenched open the gate, and was out of sight before I was able to take in her words.

Then I ran round to the front of the house, in the hope of finding Mathieu; but the entrance-hall was empty, and when

I reached Mrs. Dayrell's room, though the outer door stood open, there was not a sound. Dying!—was she really dying? Rosalie might have said it to frighten me. I had seen death once, and I shrank from it, and yet I felt impelled to push the inner door open and look in.

Madame La Peyre sat at the head of the bed; but her face was buried in her pocket-handkerchief. Angélique knelt near her, reciting prayers in so low a voice that the sound had not penetrated through the door. But she heard my entrance, and looked at me over her shoulder. I did not know what to do, so I knelt down and prayed for Mrs. Dayrell. In my ignorance, my most fervent prayer for her, and that which came first, was that she might be spared to her husband.

Suddenly there came such a shriek of agony that involuntarily I stopped my ears. I knelt on, stupefied; but I saw that neither Madame La Peyre nor Angélique seemed

frightened, though Madame looked terribly distressed.

Angélique rose up gently and took a wine-glass which Madame La Peyre fetched her from the little table in the middle of the room. Presently I heard Mrs. Dayrell's voice; it was very faint and weak.

"Pardon, Eugénie; the pain came so suddenly I could not help it, and I am a coward and I cannot bear it. I am glad Henri cannot hear me make a baby of myself."

It was awful to hear her speak jestingly, just after that terrible cry; but the poor thing did it to soothe Madame La Peyre.

No more words were said. I was almost afraid to breathe, lest the knowledge of my presence should disturb Mrs. Dayrell.

"Angélique," she said at last, "send your mistress away. Let Gertrude come; she will not suffer as thou dost, my poor Eugénie, and it makes it worse for me."

"No, no, my Barbara; I—I—" but

Madame La Peyre broke down sobbing; Angélique shook her head, she turned and looked at me, and then at the door. I felt instinctively that Angélique was the person to be obeyed, and I went up to Madame La Peyre and put my arm round her.

"Come away," I whispered; "I will take your place, and you shall come back when she is better."

She shrank away a little; but then with her usual gentleness she yielded, and I took her to the Abbé's study, and set her down in the chair in which I once fell asleep. She did not seem fit to be left alone, and, though the Abbé was not there, I felt sure he would be in directly.

While I lingered watching her, Madame La Peyre raised her head.

"Go back, Gertrude; Angélique wants help. I will stay here, and pray for my poor Barbara."

When I returned to the sick-room, Mrs. Dayrell was speaking.

"Angélique, why do you not answer me? how much more of this pain can I live through. I tell you it must not kill me till I see Henri again."

I could not hear Angélique's answer. She was bending over the suffering woman.

"Bah! bah, *ma mère!*"—Mrs. Dayrell's voice was hoarse and broken, as if she spoke with difficulty—"you propose an impossibility. I cannot offer what I do not accept. If I rebel against pain, how can I make an offering of it? Tell me that I deserve every shiver of this pain, and I believe you. I deserve it, and yet I rebel against it. If it were not that I must live and see Henri, I would snatch that opiate out of your hand, and drink it all!"

I trembled with actual fear. I saw Angélique cross herself, and then she quietly looked over her shoulder and pointed to the

door. I did not think till then that she knew I was in the room; but Mrs. Dayrell had seen her gesture and understood it.

"Do not send the child away—it is Gertrude, is it not? Why," she went on in a lower voice, to Angélique, "if you want to check this talk which shocks you, let the child stop; she is more restraint than a hardened old saint like you."

Hearing this, I went up to the bed, and drew aside the muslin bed-curtains. She was terribly changed since I had last seen her; her features looked so much larger, and the skin seemed tightly drawn across her face; all her long hair had been cut away, and perhaps its absence gave a harsher expression.

"Gertrude—tell me"—she held out her hand, it was so cold and clammy that its touch made me shiver—"you used to talk learnedly at Merdon about the power of the will. Now tell me, child, is my will strong

enough to keep me alive till my husband comes back?"

I did not know how to answer. This way of talking seemed to me so sad in a dying woman. I looked at Angélique, but she turned away her head.

"Mr. Dayrell has been gone more than two days; he will soon come back," I said, "and you will get better."

"Speak the truth, Gertrude, or I shall send you away. You do not really think I shall get better. Everyone of these spasms leaves me weaker than the last. I tell you the end has come. After all, my wish to live is mere selfishness; it will make Henri miserable to see me die. I had better get it over before he comes back."

"Don't, oh! please don't talk so!" I cried; and I felt hot tears rolling down my cheeks.

I think Mrs. Dayrell was touched, and pleased too, to see that she was loved. She smiled faintly—her smile was strangely

sweet then; but just as her eyes told me she was going to speak again, another of those fearful agonies seized her, and her shrieks seemed to fill the room.

Except that she grew suddenly pale, I do not think Angélique was moved. My hand trembled so, as I held the glass into which she poured the drops, that I wonder they were not spilled; but Angélique's hand was firm, and so was her voice when she asked me to fetch her another pillow. I believe that she made this an excuse to send me away. I suppose she saw how frightened I was.

When I came back all was still again, and Angélique was kneeling in prayer beside the bed. I knelt down too, and the silence continued; only every now and then a long gasping sigh came from the bed. Presently Angélique rose, and bent over Mrs. Dayrell.

"Shall Mademoiselle go for Monsieur l'Abbé?" she said.

"No, not yet." The voice had a faint, far-off sound, as if she were already dead, and spoke from beyond this world; the words came slowly. "I have done so little good, *ma mère*, that I should like to try now.—Where is Gertrude? It is getting dark, and I do not see her. I want to speak to her."

I went forward, and drew aside the curtain.

"Ah! you are there. Sit down and listen. Forgive me, child, I will not cry out again, if I can help it. You do not mind Angélique, do you, child? She is only our nurse, and she knows you and me, too, —better than we know ourselves—wait."

The broken voice stopped. Angélique came nearer and gave her a few drops out of another bottle. Mrs. Dayrell spoke again presently.

"Gertrude, Eugénie says you have quarrelled with your husband, and that he gives you up.—Child, child, this must be set right;

misery will follow. Stop, listen"—I checked myself, for I was ready to interrupt her —"I know more than you think I do. I saw your husband; I insisted, and Eugénie brought him to see me—I like him. I have known Eugène de Vaucresson since he was a child; do not trust him, Gertrude; you are throwing away substance for shadow, gold for tinsel, a man for a coxcomb! If I could, I would make you promise to undo this folly; but your will is like mine, headstrong. Ah! Gertrude, will you let it wreck you as it has wrecked me?"

This broken appeal stirred my heart; it made me confused and troubled.

"Oh! please do not trouble about me," I said. "Don't think of me now. I have been very foolish, and I am trying to be wiser; but my fate is decided for me—I can do nothing; but it is very kind of you to warn me."

"You mean that I am not to interfere; you were so eager to re-unite me and my

husband, why may I not take the same interest in you?"

"It seems to me the cases are quite different; but you must not trouble about me now, dear."

She did not answer. She kept her widely-opened blue eyes fixed on the muslin hangings, as if she were counting the roses thereon. Her eyes had grown larger, I thought, and the sockets seemed deeply sunk below the sharply-cut, blue-veined forehead. She spoke again presently, as if talking to herself.

"I have been in prison a year now"—I started, but she took no notice; "good people would say, in a blessed isolation from the pomps and vanities of a wicked world.—Well, perhaps they are right; the world is very like a rainbow;—no one ever touched the brightness it shows. Though I have not grown good in this prison life—I daresay many women would have been saints by this time, Gertrude—still I have

learned to think, and what you said just now sounds like nonsense.—I do not even think of love as I did. It is not the person we fancy with our short, purblind sight will love us best, that it is best to marry, but that one who will help us best against ourselves—" She stopped, and the old cynical smile crossed her lips. "What a mockery a human being is!" she said sadly. "I am preaching to you, Gertrude, and giving a crutch at the same time to my own self-will; just as if I should have been any better with a different husband—no—no hope."

I did not answer, and she seemed to forget her anxiety about me. Gradually the evening came on, the far-off corners of the large room grew dusky, and twice a bat flew across the window, striking it with his wing. I heard the wind sighing among the larch-trees. Mrs. Dayrell was restless, and her face grew flushed. I think she suffered, but she did not complain. All at

once she beckoned to me, and I put my ear down to her lips.

"Get your prayer-book presently," she whispered, "there is something there for one like me. I don't know what I say 'Amen' to when Angélique prays."

She closed her eyes with a deep sigh. It seemed as if these few whispered words had exhausted her. I saw now that her strength had not been real when she spoke to me; it seemed as if I had been unfeeling, to give her no sign of what I felt in return for so much exertion of her failing life, and yet I could not bear that she should spend her thoughts on me. I could not talk to her.

Life.—How strange and awful it seemed that this living, breathing woman was going away from earth—that her breath would be stopped, like the flame of a candle! Stopped? Yes, here to sight; but would not the life go on for ever and ever? would there be one instant's pause in that?

She would be here one instant—and the next—who could answer that awful question?

Ever since Mrs. Dayrell had those talks with Mr. Howard at Merdon, I had remarked a Bible and a Prayer-book on her dressing-table. I went and got the Prayer-book. Angélique guessed my intention, for she went to the large *armoire* at one end of the room, and opened it. I imagine she feared to listen to the prayers of heretics.

I was glad she went away. I felt awed and nervous. It seemed sad that there should be only an ignorant girl like me to minister to this dying sufferer; but as there was no one, I must do the best I could.

Mrs. Dayrell joined in the prayers, but she kept her eyes closed. When I stopped, she moved her hand towards me. I took it, and, as I kissed her, I thought she said, "God bless you!" I wondered whether she was really dying. I thought death

perhaps after all might only be like going to sleep. Poor Mr. Dayrell! would he never, never see his wife again? The stillness grew so awful that I did not dare to move. It was a great relief when Madame La Peyre's face appeared at the door.

Angélique moved quietly up to her, and they exchanged a few inaudible words; and then Madame went to the door, and beckoned in the Abbé. He went up to the bedside, and spoke. Mrs. Dayrell opened her eyes, and smiled; but she did not speak. Angélique raised her head, and gave her some nourishment; but she scarcely revived.

They stood several minutes looking at her; then the Abbé knelt down, and so did Madame La Peyre. But the Abbé did not pray aloud. At this moment I wished to change him for Mr. Howard.

When at last he went away, I followed him to the door.

"Is she dying? Will she never speak again?"

"She may live some hours," he said, sadly; "but I scarcely think she will."

"Is there no use in sending for the doctor?"

"No use; the sight of him would only disturb her."

He went, but Madame La Peyre lingered. She said to me timidly,

"I must stay; I cannot leave my poor Barbara. But I will not disturb her; I will be so quiet if I may stay." And she placed herself in a corner farthest from the bed.

She could not subdue her agitation, but she sat pale and trembling. Angélique performed her ministrations in silence, and I stood sadly beside the bed, longing to be of some use. All at once Mrs. Dayrell unclosed her eyes.

"What time is it?" she said, quite distinctly; "he will come at six."

I felt sure Mr. Dayrell could not come back so soon. I looked at my watch, and told her it was half-past five. Her lips moved, and I thought she was speaking to me. I bent down to listen.

"He will never come back,"—the agony in her voice was terrible,—"he is too glad to escape. Better—far better—he had never returned, then he would have been able to dream of my repentance; he has seen it, and he knows what a mockery it is!"

Tears began to roll down her face; I looked anxiously at Angélique. She came and gave a few drops of the stimulant which had so much revived her. Mrs. Dayrell looked round as if she had been suddenly roused.

"What was that?—Is he come yet?" she said, shrinking as if she knew what our answer would be. "I will not give a message, because I will not go till I have seen him." Then she looked up at me. "Gertrude, I sent him away for a whole

year, and now I lie hungering for one moment's sight of him.—Tell me, shall I see him, Angélique? For God's sake, tell me he will come in time;—if you will say Yes, I can wait patiently."

"The dear lady knows that it is as the good God wills." Angélique's voice trembled now, and tears streamed over her face. "Madame is content either way." And she fondly kissed the wasted hand that lay stretched on the coverlet.

Mrs. Dayrell did not answer, but I saw a frightful spasm pass over her face, and her lips closed tightly. The wasted hand clenched as if it would tear something in its grasp, but she did not shriek; a low, shuddering moan told how bravely she was bearing the anguish. It seemed like a tempest passing over a landscape. When she lay still again, Angélique tenderly wiped her forehead, and spoke some soothing words to her.

It was now quite dark; I could no long-

er see the bowed figure of Madame La Peyre in her far-off corner. There were only two candles alight; the silent gloom grew awful.

This silence lasted a long time, and yet I saw by Angélique's face that there was no change in her patient. I had not thought Death could come like this, with such a slow, gradual approach, finding us among our ordinary surroundings, just as we were.

Never, never can I forget that awful waiting. I had thought of death so differently. My mother's was, of dourse, exceptional; but when I had thought of my own death, it always seemed to me that I should be prepared, and that all my ideas and wishes would change as it approached—that mere human longings would lose their power.

How awful it was that everything should go on just as usual, and yet what kind of events might not be happening to that al-

most undiscernible form on the bed! I remembered my mother's words on board the *Adelaide*, and every now and then I prayed for this parting soul.

The sharp patter of rain on the window startled me; it was so noisy that it roused Mrs. Dayrell.

"Must I give up?—Is he not come?" she said. She was not speaking to us; she seemed to be addressing some one in the alcove on the other side of the bed. "It is harder to give up hope than to bear pain.—Oh, Henri, my darling! my darling!" —this came in a cry—"I have loved you so,—and you will never know it—never!"

Then there came a low moaning, but no more words. The rain beat more and more fiercely against the window—the wind began to howl, and to strain the tree branches. The clock in the room had been stopped, but one far off, in the stable-yard, kept on reminding us of its presence,

and I could hear Mrs. Dayrell's watch ticking from the little pocket above her head.

Tick—tick—tick—tick; in that awful silence how loud the sound grew! It seemed to have become iron-tongued, and to be striking my head as it vibrated, and then it struck my arm, and there was Angélique bidding me hold a light, and before I was quite awake, the room was filled with a shriek. Ah! I can never forget that cry. Madame La Peyre was beside the bed. I rose from my knees, and was bending forward with the light Angélique had placed in my hand, but Angélique waved us back; she would not let us see the agony that had evoked that cry. I stood shivering and trembling .... It seemed to me a long time, and then Angélique knelt down again, and prayed aloud. She rose up quickly, and I saw tears streaming from her eyes.

"Will Mademoiselle go away now?" she

whispered, "and take Madame with her? No one is of any use now but me."

Then I knew that the agony was ended, and that Death was with us in the room.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ABBÉ'S STORY.

HOW strangely grief acts!—it is like a touchstone; there are natures which shrink at its approach, and seem to lose all faculties, while others not only strive to bear it bravely, but bear also a share of the burden it lays on weaker natures. Till now I had not loved the Abbé. His manner had charmed me, and I always felt subdued by his gentle influence, but I learned both to love and reverence him in the sad days that followed Mrs. Dayrell's death. Madame La Peyre did not give way to violent grief. She was very silent, and her red and swollen eyelids told how

much she suffered, but she had only strength to be passively resigned, while the Abbé arranged and saw to the execution of everything, and besides was always on the watch to comfort his sorrowing sister and Angélique—for Angélique's grief was, I felt, deeper than the grief even of Madame La Peyre; there seemed to be much touching sympathy and affection in the Abbé's manner towards the patient, uncomplaining woman.

I think they had both laboured for Mrs. Dayrell's conversion, and had longed to see her what they would have called "a true penitent" before she died, and this wish had established a strong sympathy between them.

I knew we were all counting the hours with sickening anxiety till Mr. Dayrell arrived. The Abbe had sent a messenger to meet him, but we had no assurance that he would be found.

"Mademoiselle," Angelique said, "it is

of Monsieur Dayrell that we must all think now; his grief will be terrible."

He arrived in the afternoon of the second day after his wife's death. I met him on the staircase, and, except that he passed me with only a bow, I should not have guessed that anything unusual had happened to him; but there was never full daylight on the staircase, and I shrank from looking closely at him. He locked himself in his wife's room, and stayed there so long that at last the Abbé went to summon him.

I had gone to Madame La Peyre, and we both sat and cried together as we tried to realise his feelings. It seemed to me they must be so terrible. How bitterly he must mourn the estrangement of this last year, even if he had not been much to blame! Oh! how he must long at this dreadful time to unsay every unkind word, to obliterate every cold look and action which

had galled the proud heart which now lay so still!

I broke down so utterly in my efforts to comfort Madame La Peyre, and gave way to such a burst of sobs, that she dried her eyes and looked up suddenly.

"What is it, my child, my Gertrude?"

And then I told her what I felt Mr. Dayrell must be feeling. I was surprised when she shook her head.

"These thoughts will come to him, doubtless," she said; "they must always come to the best of us even—for which of us, Gertrude, has loved his neighbours as *le bon Dieu* means us to love one another? But remember all these faults are not only against the person we mourn, and unless I am mistaken in Henri, he learned to sorrow truly for his errors before he returned to my poor Barbara."

Next morning was bright and sparkling, and I thought how often Mrs. Dayrell had wished to be out in the sunshine when it

came shining in her room at Merdon. It streamed brilliantly on the little procession with its burden, moving slowly and sadly to the gate. It was on its way to Yvetôt, where Mr. Dayrell would join it.

Old Mathieu had asked leave to follow it as far the village, where the waggon waited for it, and he and Angélique walked side by side some little distance behind Mr. Dayrell.

"He leaves us to-day for England," Madame La Peyre said; "he is gentle, much calmer than we could have hoped; but he tells me he cannot return to Château Fontaine at present—he can only endure life alone. After a while he will come back to us."

After hearing this, I was surprised when in the afternoon Angélique brought me a message.

"Mr. Dayrell is in the salon, Mademoiselle, and he would like to say good-bye to you before he goes."

"Oh, Angélique," I said, in alarm, "what can I do? I do not know what I ought to say to him."

She gave me one of her cheering smiles.

"Never trouble about what to say, Mademoiselle; perhaps Mademoiselle will only have to listen."

What a wonderful power Angélique has over me! In a moment I felt quiet and composed; I forgot to think about my own nervousness; Mr. Dayrell and his sorrow filled my heart. He was standing near one of the screens, which looked more faded than ever against the intense black he wore. He was very pale, and much thinner, but he looked calm, and as he came forward and took my hand he smiled.

"I could not go without saying good-bye to you," he said. "I want to thank you for your kindness—I should say, your love—for—for she often said she could never tell me how you had helped and cheered her life at Merdon, more than you knew."

"No one could help loving her," I said.

But I found it hard to speak—I could scarcely keep from crying—this seemed so undeserved; for I thought how often I had resented her manner,—but his deep calm helped me. I recognised his English nature in it. A sudden impulse seized me; why should I not tell him the words which only I had heard?

"Do you know what her constant thought was," I said—"even to the last?"

He looked at me eagerly, and I repeated the sad words I had heard—trembling after I began lest they should overcome him. Hot tears dropped on my hand as he still held it.

"May God bless you!" he said. "I could never thank you enough for this comfort."

Then he wrung my hand hard, and went hurriedly to join the Abbé, who was to go with him as far as Yvetôt.

A strange feeling of relief had come into the house next morning, and yet not of

relief from sorrow. It was difficult to believe that one need not still move silently about the house, and above all it was difficult to believe that I could keep Angélique as long as I liked to talk to her, for of late her time had been wholly occupied with Mrs. Dayrell.

"We must take care of Angélique; all this has tried her," Madame La Peyre said to me; "she loved my poor Barbara so much."

And, indeed, from the day of the funeral Angélique looked paler and thinner; she even began to stoop a little; before she had been erect—even to stiffness.

"Angélique," I said—she was setting my *armoire* to rights, and I was much struck with her paleness—"you must rest more than you do; you have gone through far more in all this sorrow than any one else has; you do many things for me which I could do for myself. Come"—I bent down over her as she stooped to a drawer —"come," her cheeks felt thin and soft as

I kissed them, "I am going to manage you and take care of you now—it is plain that you will not take care of yourself."

She stooped still lower, and I saw that she was wiping her eyes covertly, but she turned round on me with a smiling face.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle, but if Mademoiselle is so kind as to wish to help me, she will let me do as much for her as I can, it helps me to be doing. But Mademoiselle is not well herself, she looks very pale and changed; I am only an old nurse, Mademoiselle knows, but a nurse must always have her baby."

She nodded, and went away with a collection she had been making among my clothes, and I saw that tears were running down her worn face.

"Only an old nurse!" That had been Mrs. Dayrell's favourite name for Angélique.

I thought that when she got a little stronger I would get Angélique to take me

about among the cottages. It seemed as if change must be good for her after her long nursing. I did not know that I was going to lay a fresh burden on her, and yet I felt strangely weak and exhausted.

At dinner-time, a few days after Mr. Dayrell went away, the Abbé said he wanted me to come to his study when I could spare an hour.

"I will come now," I said.

He had been so very kind, tender even, in his manner to everyone since that sad Monday night; and now a touch of his formal courtesy chilled me as he made me a low bow and held the study door open for me to pass in.

"Will Madame be seated?" he said, in his polite, conventional manner.

"Oh, Monsieur l'Abbé," I said, "please call me Gertrude, or I shall think you are angry with me."

He turned his head aside, and I think his voice shook a little.

"No, I am not angry, my dear child—not angry with you, I am sure; you have to suffer for the faults of others."

He pointed to a chair opposite the one in which he always sat. I felt interested, and nervous too, as I sat down to listen; for I now understood that he had something special and serious to tell me.

The Abbé looked earnestly at me, so long and so earnestly that I grew red under his scrutiny. He saw this, and he sighed as he looked away.

"I had fully meant," he said, "to have spoken to you on that day I met you in the garden with Monsieur de Vaucresson, but so much has come between that I have postponed doing this; and yet, my child, it must be said—it is a duty I owe both to you and to Captain Brand."

I had thought more than once of that strange, painful scene in the little garden, and had resolved not to judge Eugène till I had spoken with the Abbé; but it all

seemed dim, far off now, it was an effort to go back to it. I could hardly believe that this change in my feelings had come little more than a week ago.

But when the Abbé spoke of Captain Brand I looked up eagerly. A conviction came to me that only through the Abbé should I ever get tidings of my guardian.

"I must begin at the beginning," he said earnestly, "and therefore I must go back to last year; forgive me if I pain you."

He looked straight across the room fixedly, and I loved the Abbé at that moment for his tender reticence. I grew hot and cold with shame; I could not bear to think of last year now. I bent my head. He did not look at me even then, but went on—

"Captain Brand, on his first visit, told me he did not like you to be with Eugène de Vaucresson; and that, therefore, he could not consider my sister a suitable guardian for you, as my pupil would pro-

bably visit here after your return from Devonshire. I told him that under Madame La Peyre's guardianship you would see little of Monsieur de Vaucresson, as she would always be with you. Then he told me very simply, but with much earnest feeling, all that had happened on board the *Adelaide*."

Here the Abbé paused. I glanced up, and he looked so very sad and serious that I was frightened.

"I must tell you that I was very much troubled. Catholics, as you perhaps know, consider marriage a sacrament; and it seems to me that you were heedless—indeed, much in the wrong, and greatly in need of careful guidance. At first I agreed with Captain Brand that I could not send you to my sister; and I added that he would do well to place you with his own mother. I must tell you his answer.

"'You misjudge Miss Stewart,' he said; "she is very young, and has the thoughtlessness of youth, and she is very innocent of

any knowledge of evil; I trust her entirely, but I do not trust your pupil. I do not like him. She does not wish to go to my mother, and therefore I will place her with Madame La Peyre; as you say, she will always be with her.'

"However, as soon as he reached England, Captain Brand wrote to me, and begged me to tell Monsieur de Vaucresson of your marriage. I saw objections to this, and I wrote these objections to Captain Brand, but he answered my letter at once, and urged me so strongly that I had no choice. I therefore told Eugène that, although you were called Miss Stewart, you were married to Captain Brand, and that in two years he would claim you as his wife."

"Then he knew it before he first wrote to me," I said, angrily.

The Abbé looked at me. He was evidently puzzled.

"But, my child, you knew it too," he said.

"Yes, yes. Ah!" And I hid my burning face. All the vague misty doubt I had tried to wrap round my marriage was torn away to the last shred, and I saw—oh! how plainly!—my self-deceit and wrong-doing. I actually resented in Eugène the conduct I had justified in myself. I believe, just then, I thought myself worthy of any punishment.

The Abbé went on—"Before Captain Brand told me about his marriage, he had engaged me to secresy; and I was much troubled when he insisted that this secresy must extend for the present to Madame La Peyre. In his letter to me he promised to be guided by circumstances; but his idea was to leave you wholly free and unfettered—he said already your liberty had been trespassed on in the hasty marriage. Well," the Abbé sighed, "all that has been done, and is past. We will not speak of it again. We are coming to a part of your life which is not past, and which you have yet to decide."

I looked up trembling. I forgot what he had said about the sanctity of marriage, and I thought he wanted me to marry Eugène.

"Monsieur," I said, "whether Captain Brand is able to set me free or not, I can never love Monsieur de Vaucresson. I can never see him again."

"Really! is this true?" I bowed my head. He looked suddenly softened, and his voice changed at once—"Then, my dear child, I have little more to say; and if I had known this sooner, I should have begun my explanation in a different way. I will hurry on now. The last time Captain Brand was here, you and he both agreed, I understand, to a separation. In your country such things are, I am told, possible, but to us they are unusual and wrong. Marriage is so very holy—a sacrament, as I said—that we consider even a thought against its power to be mortal sin."

I shuddered. It seemed as if a curse had been spoken, and that my veins filled suddenly with ice.

"After Monsieur le Capitaine left you, he came to me. He did not speak of his own feelings; but he said he could never be your husband, and that you had no wish to be his wife. He asked me some questions about my pupil, and he said that, if legal arrangements could be made to set the marriage aside, it seemed to him desirable that you and Monsieur de Vaucresson should be allowed to meet."

"He said that?"

"Yes; and then he smiled, and said to me: 'You see, Monsieur l'Abbé, I have not outgrown romance even yet, and I think, when there is love on both sides, a marriage is pretty sure to be happy. My only doubt is whether your pupil is worthy of her.'"

I had not been able to help crying, and my sobs checked the Abbé. Oh! how black my own wicked, self-willed folly grew

in the light of Captain Brand's generosity! After a little pause, the Abbé went on, but he spoke slowly, as if he feared to pain me.

"Then, my dear child, I was compelled to tell Captain Brand the truth—that I felt sure—knew that, even if you were free, my pupil would not marry you," he hurried on, but the words had lost their power to wound—I was too wretched to feel resentment; "and I told him, too, that as a priest I could not sanction my pupil's marriage with a Protestant, who was still, in my opinion, bound by the first marriage."

"What answer did he make?" I said eagerly.

"He said, 'Then you perhaps condemn Miss Stewart to a single life, for she will never be my wife.' But, my dear child, this explanation is unnecessary; I wish to explain that which has happened so lately. I was, as you may think, very much grieved and displeased when I learned that

Monsieur de Vaucresson had dared to write to you after all he knew, after all he had said to me, for, when I told him of your marriage, he gave me to understand that he had no special regard for you, and that even if you were free, he should have no wish to marry; and I resolved, if I saw need, to inform you of his real sentiments. Meantime I wrote to him a severe letter, in which I forbade him even to hold any communication with Château Fontaine, and rebuked his conduct to you in my sister's name. To my surprise, he told me that he had received a letter from Captain Brand, in which that gentleman calmly asked his intentions with regard to you, supposing the marriage was set aside. By the same post came a few stern words to me from Captain Brand. He said that De Vaucresson had answered his letter, and that he must never see you again; and that, if his sailing orders had not arrived some days before he expected,

he should have returned to Normandy, and taken you to his mother in England. You may, therefore, judge how great was our anxiety and distress when my pupil so suddenly presented himself at Château Fontaine. We had planned the journey to Dieppedale, lest this chance should happen. I must tell you that your courage and simplicity saved me much trouble; but until to-day I was not sure that I quite understood your feelings. Now that I do understand you, I must ask you to give me a proof that you are in earnest."

"A proof! I will do what you please. What can I do?" My forehead was full of pain, and my temples seemed to be swelling with the pulses that beat in them. I could hardly understand the Abbé's words.

He looked at me, and then he rose, and poured me out a glass of water; but I felt powerless to take it from his hand.

"Tell me, please," I said.

"Well,"—he smiled, and spoke more

easily; "there, there, my child, you have excited yourself too much. It is only that I think the best way to end this painful matter is for you to write a few words—I will dictate them—to Monsieur de Vaucresson."

"I cannot, Monsieur; I ought not. I wish to have no more communication of any kind with him. You do not know all he said to me; and all you have told me makes him worse than I thought."

"Yes, yes, I can guess; I know, perhaps, more than you do; and I have grave reasons for urging this really trifling matter, so far as it regards you. Pray be guided by me, Gertrude."

All that followed is misty and disjointed in my mind—as if it had been dreamed instead of acted. I know the Abbé placed me at his desk, and I wrote down words as he spoke them. I believe I told Eugène that I did not love him, and that I refused ever to see him again. I signed my name

with difficulty. Then I took the glass of water from the table; I heard a crash as it fell; and then came darkness. . . .

CHAPTER X.

TOO LATE.

WHEN last I looked out of window, the trees had that exquisite powdery green tint which fades away with Spring; but to-day, as for the first time Angélique wheels the chair in which she sometimes places me, to the window, I see that even the full glory of Summer has gone by; there is a sombre tint on the elms and poplars; and a group of maple-trees near the house is already touched with crimson streaks. It does not seem long ago since Angélique brought me dinner, and yet it is growing dusk already.

Till to-day I have scarcely felt awake

enough to ask questions; and even now I like better to smile at my kind nurse and look out of window than to talk. Presently Madame La Peyre comes in; she kisses me fondly, and speaks as softly as if I were a baby.

"It is charming to see thee so much better, my little one," and she draws my shawl tenderly round me, and kisses me again.

I suppose I am very weak, for, as I smile at Madame, I find the tears are in my eyes. Angélique shakes her head.

"Mademoiselle is not good," she says; "if she cries she will spoil all the frills of her *peignoir*, and I goffered them myself."

This little scolding makes me laugh.

"I begin to think nursing agrees with you, Angélique; you look twice as well as you did the other day."

Madame and Angélique look at one another.

"Thou must not talk much, my Ger-

trude; it is probably two months, perhaps longer, since thou hast been well enough to study the looks of Angélique."

"Ah, then I have been very ill?"

"Yes;" and a sparkle comes into the sweet old dark eyes, and Madame La Peyre looks as bright as she used to look at Merdon; "but, my Gertrude, if I talk about thy illness, Angélique will certainly scold me; she says invalids must be amused."

"How is Monsieur l'Abbé, and why does he not come to see me?"

"He did come often at first, dear little one, but then he was in vacation; he has a post in Paris, which just now demands his constant presence."

They need not have feared I should talk too much; even these few words had exhausted me, and I was content to lean back and listen to Madame's pretty chat about all sorts of things; it was so pretty, and so glibly told, that I thought she must have

made it up for my benefit; it was almost incredible that so much that was amusing could take place in the quiet little village beside the Seine.

After this, time slipped away, and though the hours seemed to pass slowly, yet, looking back along a week, the days had gone rapidly. I made progress fitfully; sometimes I astonished Angélique, and then I went back for a day or two into utter weakness. I can never tell of the sweet gentleness of Madame La Peyre, or how good and patient my dear nurse was, for though I tried to remember her devotion, and to give as little trouble as I could, still I know I was often impatient and restless.

"I shall soon be off your hands," I said one evening, "and then what will you do?"

She smiled.

"Then I shall have to take Mademoiselle down to Fontaine, to see some of the good

people who have been so anxious for her health."

"Have they been anxious, dear, kind people? Why, they did not know me."

"Ah, but yes—our people have seen Mademoiselle in church and at market, and they love her already; and not our people only, one Saturday, when I left Mademoiselle in the care of Madame, I went to Caudebec, and Marie Touchet and Madame Vagnon, and even la Veuve Chéron, were full of inquiries for Mademoiselle."

"How soon shall I be strong enough to go and see Marie Touchet, you dear old thing?"

"But Mademoiselle is strong enough to take a drive now; some day soon she shall go and see Marie."

"Yes, but I must go with you, please. Marie will not talk to Madame or to me as she talks to you, Angélique. Oh, I must go soon; I want to see that pretty Fifine."

"Then Mademoiselle will have to go to

Caudebec. Fifine has been Madame Léon Leroux this last fortnight."

"Already?"

"But it was two months since the day of betrothal," says Angélique impressively, "and two months is rather long for an engagement."

"Is it?"

This talk set me thinking, and for the first time since my illness I was able to think connectedly. Before this, whenever I tried to go back to that talk with the Abbé I found myself wandering off into quite trivial matters—as to how I should have a new gown made, or when my hair would grow long again, or something equally irrelevant. I learned much later that I had had brain fever, and I suppose this accounted for the listless, torpid way in which I had been content to live since I began to recover; for, though almost every day I walked up and down the avenue, leaning on Angélique's arm, I felt no wish to pass beyond

the gates, or even to cross the bridge behind the Château.

To-day I had taken a longer walk than usual, and fell asleep on the sofa when I came in; and now, after this talk with Angélique, my brains seemed to have shaken into place again, and I went on thinking.

And thinking over all that happened since I left Tasmania—so long ago in feeling, so short a while in actual time—I broke down, crying bitterly. It seemed to me that till now I had never really felt my mother's loss—never mourned her enough. If I had loved her truly, should I not have trusted to her wisdom? And yet the whole purpose of my life since she left me had been to harden myself in disobedience to what at the time I considered her last wish. Then, as thought went on growing clearer and more piercing in the conviction it brought, I saw how this principle of rebellion had been the bitter root of my after wrong-

doing. Even if I had been treated unfairly—still it was all done in love and by my mother. The Abbé's words came back with a power which made me lie back on the couch exhausted, for if I so deeply repented disobedience towards my mother, what sorrow could be sufficient for my rebellion against a manifest ordinance of God. I saw now for the first time where I had gone astray; I had been right in my belief that marriage without love was sin, but I had wilfully determined that, because I could not love Captain Brand, that ceremony on board the *Adelaide* was a mockery. I had acted on this belief as if I had been free. I cast away the excuse which my youth and my ignorance might have given. I was a child, but I was not a fool. Deeply as it burned itself into my heart, I saw the truth now. I had wilfully shut my eyes to the sanctity of marriage and made a law for myself, and but for God's

mercy I might be more hopelessly wretched than I was.

As I lay there, not agitated as I used to be, but calmly considering the past, I asked myself suddenly if it was yet too late to make the only atonement in my power, and tell Captain Brand I was willing to do my duty, and to ask him to receive me as his wife? It was not a pleasant thought. I still believed that, unless a wife loved her husband, she must be a wretched woman—and I felt that I could never love Captain Brand; but with this shrinking came the remembrance of Mrs. Dayrell's warning—he would help me to be better, and at least it would be doing something against my will.

For a time I felt soothed; I believe this idea of self-sacrifice pleased my self-love. I was going to do at last something to match, in some degree, Captain Brand's own generosity.

Next morning when I woke I was not

quite so content, and I suppose Angélique saw my trouble in my face while she dressed me.

"If Mademoiselle wills," she said, "we will go and see Madame Roussel, at the Mill. She has asked every day for news of Mademoiselle; and, from the window in the Mill, one can see on the left the church of Le Trait, and on the right, nearly as far as Quillebœuf."

"I would rather go and see Marie Touchet."

I felt cross and contradictory.

"*Allons*," Angélique smiled; "Mademoiselle is getting well so fast that she will soon be able to go so far; but, for to-day, the carriage is not ready, and Baptiste, our coachman, is ill, and the Mill is close by. Mademoiselle must get on by little steps, as the bebbies."

"Very well; but, Angélique, it is you who are getting self-willed."

"Ah," she says, brightly, "that is right;

it is always a happy day for the nurse when her patient is not quite content. *Allons*, in a week we shall see Mademoiselle running downstairs." She went away and left me with my breakfast.

It may be convalescence that makes me feel so cross and troubled, but there is another cause for the gloom that possesses me this morning. I quite overlooked yesterday, when I was arguing the matter with myself, that Captain Brand told the Abbé, and me too, that he should never consider me as his wife. Is this because I have so greatly offended him? or is it personal dislike? In one case I might hope to soften him by my repentance, but the other is quite different, and this doubt makes my plan impossible. If I could only see him, I think I should be able to find out—and then the intense shame that comes at the thought of seeing him, now that I know how much he has to forgive, makes me conscious that my idea of yester-

day had no reality in it; I could never say one word.

By the time Angélique comes back, I have grown so troubled and perplexed and morbid with all this self-communing, that I refuse to go to the Mill.

"Angélique, I am fit for nothing but to lie on the sofa and knit."

Angélique yields, but I can see she thinks I give way. Perhaps I do; but my head aches so badly that I cannot even knit.

CHAPTER XI.

MY BIRTHDAY.

IT is Spring again—a bright Spring morning—almost a year since I last wrote down what was happening.

I suppose I began to think too soon, or I worried myself; whatever it was, I fell ill again, and it was long before I recovered my strength. For several weary months I continued in a low, nervous state. The Abbé arrived just before November, and spent a few weeks at the Château, and he seemed dismayed at the change in me.

"You want me, Gertrude," he said—ah! how kind and fatherly he was, and how I rejoiced to have him with us again!—"and

you want mental occupation. Your brain has been rusting; I shall set you far more difficult tasks than I used to do."

I laughed, but I felt that he was right. I had spent my time in constant self-reproach, and regret for the past; and when I was with Madame La Peyre our talk seldom went beyond embroidery, or the sickness and needs, and various little events, of our villagers. I always grew cheerful with Angélique, but she had been away for a week lately, in retreat with the religious community of which she was an unattached member. The Château was quite changed without her; and when she and the Abbé arrived the same evening, it seemed like a festival.

So I worked hard with the Abbé, first at German, and then I persuaded him to teach me Latin; he refused for some time, asserting that learning was very unnecessary to a woman. I believe I conquered him by saying I was anxious to follow the

service in church in the original, for I am sure both he and Angélique longed earnestly for my conversion, although they refrained from actual persuasion. Then, at the Abbé's suggestion, I had a professor from Rouen once a week for music and singing—a grave, spectacled, very uninteresting personage; but I liked him as a master, for he was strict and hard to please. Little by little my days were filled with occupation, and I rarely found time for sad thoughts.

Every now and then a letter from my father or one of my sisters stirred my heart with ardent longing for home, but there was no hint of any wish to see me there; the inquiry was always the same—When would my husband return, and when did he wish me to be addressed as Mrs. Brand?

In his last letter my father spoke very strongly on this point, and said he thought it had been a grave error from the begin-

ning that I had not taken my husband's name. I think my father is right; but I am helpless in the matter, because it was Captain Brand's arrangement that I should be called Miss Stewart. We do not know where he is. All that the Abbé can tell me is, that his ship was bound for Hudson's Bay, that he expected to be away a year, and that he promised to write to the Abbé directly he returned.

This bright Spring morning is my birthday, but I do not feel very happy, although the Abbé, Madame La Peyre, and Angélique are bent on making a festival of it.

I found a bouquet beside my bed when I woke this morning, and at breakfast the Abbé gave me a charming edition of "Paul et Virginie," and dear Madame La Peyre fastened round my neck the quaintest necklace I had ever seen, which she said had once belonged to a Queen of France.

"The Duponts are coming to keep our child's birthday," she said to the Abbé,

"so you must help me to talk to Madame, for Monsieur Dupont will only have ears for Gertrude; he told me when I went to St. Antoine that he did not think any English young lady could be so charming —he fancied they were all rude and dull and awkward."

"He is very absurd. Suppose I were to think that all Frenchmen were like Monsieur Dupont—ah! but I could not do that—could I, *mon père*, after living at Château Fontaine?"

The Abbé smiled, and shook his head; he asked me if I wanted a holiday.

"Do you?" I said. "I enjoy your lessons too much to wish to lose one, and I am not a child now, Monsieur; I am eighteen."

"Thou wilt always be a child, my Gertrude"—there were tears in Madame's eyes—"and it is a blessing to be thankful for; I hope never to be quite a full-grown woman," she said, saucily.

"This is edifying advice from a guardian to her charge," the Abbé laughed; "it is evident, my sister, that thou art not suited to the post of a duenna. Come, Gertrude, shall we take a walk before we go to the study?"

I did not often get a walk with the Abbé, for he seldom went out in the morning, and I was still too delicate to face the evening air. I had grown taller, and very thin, and I could see that I was considered an anxious charge.

"Monsieur"—I usually called the Abbé *mon père* when I called him anything, but I felt timid now—"you said that—that Captain Brand would write as soon as he returned; he has been gone more than a year—tell me, is it not strange that he does not write?"

The Abbé flushed a little.

"Has the year expired?—your memory is better than mine. I can, however, write to the English lawyer who manages Cap-

tain Brand's money matters, and ask if either he or his ship has been heard of. You are, then, anxious for news of Captain Brand?" He looked inquisitive.

"I think we must always be anxious about friends at sea," I said, coldly. I do not want to tell anyone the resolution I have made. Until I see Captain Brand I cannot know whether my sacrifice would be acceptable to him, and there would be a sort of mock heroism in asserting my willingness to do what may never be required of me. I am not overwrought and morbid now; I never felt so real before, and therefore I shrink from forecasting events, and try to live in the present; but something warns me that, although a sense of accomplished duty may in the far-off future give me content, still I can never live the free, happy life with Captain Brand that I live at Château Fontaine.

I suppose love—I mean the special love I read about in books—is not in my nature,

for if I had really loved Eugène I could not have been cured so quickly. My idea of real love is that it cannot die or change its object; no matter what a man is, a woman will love him through all; she may refuse to marry him, but she will never be untrue to her love. The Abbé said once that there is an earthly imitation of all that is in heaven; it seems to me that real love, such as I imagine it, is as simple and as devoted as the love that holy people like Angélique have for God, only quite happy in the presence of its object.

Perhaps the surest proof that I never really loved Eugène is that my idea of love itself has intensified; if two people truly love, it seems to me they will not care for talk or amusement, they will be simply happy in the consciousness of each other's presence; a look, a gesture even, will give all the assurance needed that each is blessed with the love of the other. When I looked forward to seeing Eugène, I thought

of charming amusement, and the delight of the sweet flattering things he said, and besides, I clung to the remembrance of his fascinating influence; I felt that strongly even in our last meeting—ah, yes—as I think of it, that meeting comes back so vividly that I bend over my book, and shrink from my own thoughts.

I most earnestly hope I shall never see Eugène again. I do not love him, or I could not think so badly of him, but I still dread myself when I think of his influence —and yet if I were Captain Brand's wife I should feel safe.

I fear that, though I am changed in some ways, I am still more easily influenced for evil than for good; and that, though I shrink from Eugène, still it is only duty and principle that make me shrink. I can never love him; but if he were but good, I believe I should think him charming. Now when I think of Captain Brand, although duty, principle, every feeling that belongs

to the word "ought," tell me to love him, I cannot; I feel only a timid reverence and gratitude for the forbearance he has shown towards me, and a great safety in the thought of his protection, if he would give it to me.

"You are silent, my child." I gave such a sudden start that the Abbé looked at me attentively. "You are not unhappy, Gertrude?"

"Oh, no, *mon père*. How could I be unhappy when you are all so good to me? But," I screwed up my courage, and looked at him earnestly, "I wish you would be so kind as to write to this agent without delay. Captain Brand will not—I mean, he said he would never come back to Château Fontaine unless I asked him to come. I feel—that is—I mean—do you not think I ought to ask him to come? He is still my guardian."

The Abbé bowed, in his grave, courteous way, but he did not look at me; and

I felt chilled and silenced. I knew he was displeased with me, and yet I could not open my heart. Perhaps, if he had questioned me, I could have told him just then both my resolution aud my doubts, but I am not sure. It may be because as a child I lived so much to myself, but it is always very difficult to me to speak to anyone of inner feelings.

"There can be no doubt that he is your guardian, my dear child," the Abbé said. "I will write to-day, and if the answer brings us the news of Captain Brand's return, then you shall write to him, and ask him to come here, and we shall have the pleasure of seeing him at Château Fontaine."

"Thank you very much. Can your letter go to-day?"

The Abbé smiled. Ah, how age must chill the blood! He did not seem to feel a spark of my eagerness.

"If I am to send my letter off to-day, Mademoiselle Gertrude must go without her

reading; for we may expect Monsieur and Madame Dupont at any moment."

"Monsieur,"—I suppose contradiction at the Abbé's calm made me inclined to tease —"don't you think Monsieur Dupont is very ridiculous?"

"You mean he makes you laugh?"

"Not quite that. You make me laugh; and so does Madame La Peyre. But I laugh *at* Monsieur Dupont."

"Yes." The Abbé smiled so genially that I thought he agreed with me, and I felt some surprise; for I had said this on purpose to tease him; but he added—"And possibly he laughs at us too."

The Abbé was laughing now at me.

"Well, he may laugh at me, and very likely he does; but he cannot laugh at you, or at Madame La Peyre."

The Abbé seemed quite amused at this.

"My dear child, Monsieur Dupont does not see us as we see ourselves, or as you in your lovingness see us."

"Ah, but it is impossible we can be so ridiculous as he is."

"I cannot agree with you; at some time or other we are always ridiculous to others. You have been reared among quiet, self-controlled people; and you must remember, Gertrude, that the English are considered by other nations cold and undemonstrative. There is much less self-repression among us. But I am not sure that our friend in St. Antoine is really vainer than the Englishman, who sits in silence because he is too proud to make mistakes. Monsieur Dupont is at least more useful—he makes *les frais* of the conversation."

"Well, *mon père*, I will try not to think him ridiculous; but I am not convinced."

Very soon after I left the study I heard the grate of carriage-wheels, and went down into the hall with Madame La Peyre to receive the visitors.

Madame Dupont was almost unchanged. I believe she still wore the last year's bon-

net; her form was as severe, her broad face looked as wooden, and browner than ever. She sailed up the steps, her husband following with a large bouquet of narcissus and tulips bordered by exquisite pansies.

I thought his greetings to Madame La Peyre would never be ended; but he did not offer her the bouquet. When he had ended his compliments, he wheeled suddenly round on his heels, and made me so low a bow that I could hardly help laughing.

"Mademoiselle, I have the honour to congratulate you on your birthday, and to offer you these flowers. They are simple garden-flowers; a poor offering, but in their Spring freshness they are in harmony with the youth and beauty of Mademoiselle."

Another bow, and then he stood straight and erect, to see the effect of his speech. I saw him glance at his wife, and she gave a semi-smile of approval—perhaps she had

concocted the little speech, and he had said it off from memory.

"Thank you very much, Monsieur, for your good wishes; I think the flowers are lovely." But I am sure Monsieur Dupont expected a longer, prettier sentence; for he stood waiting, with his mouth half open, like a dog waiting for a biscuit. The Abbé is right; it is on the whole simpler and pleasanter to others to be able to express one's feelings easily.

I had not seen Monsieur Dupont and the Abbé together; and when the *père* came in, it seemed to me that he was just as effusive as his visitor was. The two gentlemen bowed and shook hands, and then bowed again, and exchanged inquiries—keeping each other standing about four times as long as the greeting between two Englishmen would have taken. When this was over, Monsieur Dupont turned to me.

"I trust Mademoiselle has quite reco-

vered her health, and that we may hope soon to have the pleasure of receiving her at St. Antoine. Ah, it is there Mademoiselle will see a farm-yard as it should be—pigs, cows, chickens; if Mademoiselle will believe me, never did she see such turkeys as the turkeys of Madame Dupont. Madeselle likes turkey?" I nodded, for he gave me no chance of getting in a word. "It is, I believe, a dish that is eaten in England at Christmas, with onions. Ah, but it is sad that such a beautiful fowl should be spoiled by such bad cooking. Mademoiselle, until you have eaten a larded turkey *aux truffes*, you will pardon me, but you must not consider you know the taste of the beast."

Then he turned swiftly to Madame La Peyre, who was being instructed by Madame Dupont in the art of propagating heart's-ease so as to keep the flowers large. I thought Madame Dupont was dissatisfied with her pupil, her eyes looked very hard and slaty, and she was extra stiff and an-

gular as she sat bolt upright staring at the gentle old lady, who received her instructions with smiling grace. But Monsieur Dupont broke in on the conference.

"Madame," he said, rubbing his hands and smiling, "I rejoice to see Mademoiselle so much better; but permit me to say that Mademoiselle is pale and thin also. Now observe, I beseech you, the colours on the cheeks of Madame Dupont." He turned and pointed towards her, as a showman in a travelling menagerie points out a wild beast. "These colours, Madame, are the result of *les bains*—nothing else, I assure you; and if Mademoiselle, as soon as the season comes round again, goes away with you, Madame, to Les Petites Dalles—ah, *ma foi!* but it is a place to know about, Les Petites Dalles,—and if Mademoiselle takes forty-eight—what do I say?—even thirty-six sea-baths, she will return to Château Fontaine with a bloom of childhood—*tenez*, with a bloom like

that on the cheeks of Madame Dupont."

He made a little pause, cleared his throat, and looked at us in smiling triumph.

Madame Dupont was not at all abashed at this public appeal to her blooming cheeks—indeed, they seemed to dilate with satisfaction. I thought if any thing so like a painted wooden doll was to be the result, I would rather leave Les Petites Dalles unvisited.

"Forty-eight baths is a large number, Monsieur;" and I thought Madame La Peyre looked mischievously at her visitor. He spun round on his heels at once to face her, and his words came in a splutter of haste.

"But no, Madame—pardon—on the contrary,—Madame Dupont has before now taken sixty,—as Madame knows it is so much better to take the tickets by dozens; but it is a question of scientific management and much serious forethought. Ah, but yes,"—his voice went

up to a shrill falsetto in his excitement—"sea-bathing is a science, and it is the persons foolish as geese who come and bathe without due regard and forethought, who make it to be supposed that there is a risk in bathing. Look at me, Madame," he patted his plump sides and the front of his white waistcoat, and then went on shovelling out his words as coals are shovelled on the fire; "I am well—I am strong—Aha, my strength would astonish you, and to what is it to be attributed? Madame, it is to the sea-baths of last Autumn, taken with precaution—with precaution, I say—to which I attribute it. At Les Petites Dalles I rise according to the tide; if it serves at seven o'clock, *bon;* I rise early, and am in the water at seven. I take three plunges—no more," counting them on his fingers. He held out his broad, flat hand, like the paddle of a duck, and almost as yellow. "Three plunges, and then I return to my hotel, where I find

my warm foot-bath and my warm towels. I take a *bouillon*, then a walk of about half an hour; then, after, I breakfast. If the tide mounts later, I rise late, and take breakfast so soon as my bath is completed; but never—no, not to my dearest friend, do I give a moment of conversation between my bath and my breakfast; I should infallibly injure my digestion—*voilà*."

I ventured to remark, when he paused to take breath, that I should not like the plan of rising so as to suit the tide.

"Ah! but pardon,"—his eyes got so round with eagerness that he looked more than ever like a frog—"that is just the important point. By early rising on a day of late tide Mademoiselle runs the risk of fatigue, conversation, and the numerous little accidents which exhaust the nerves and wear away the finer tissues of life, before she takes her bath. No, Mademoiselle, unless the sea-bath is treated with the respect due to so great a science, it becomes

dangerous and unhealthy." He drew himself up with excitement, till he was almost standing on his toes.

I looked at the Abbé—even he must surely regard this fuss about bathing as absurd; but no, he was listening with earnest attention, nodding his head with approval, and he even made inquiries about Les Petites Dalles, and the best means of reaching it.

"There is one advice,"—Monsieur Dupont spread widely the fingers of both hands, to give emphasis to his words—"Monsieur must be careful not to allow these ladies to linger on the sea-coast when once the weather becomes cold. On that northern coast the wind is"—here Monsieur Dupont's grimace expressed any amount of discomfort—"it is fierce, it is brutal in its violence, and the cold,"—he shivered—"my teeth chatter in only thinking of it."

"Monsieur Dupont suffers very much

from cold weather." His wife says this with a strong dash of pity.

"Monsieur must, then, have suffered this Winter," says Madame La Peyre; "it has been so very cold."

"Madame Dupont is right, I suffer much; I have been told," says Monsieur Dupont—it is extraordinary how he can so monopolise conversation—"that in the north this Winter the cold has been—ah, *mon Dieu!* what shall I say?—sailors have been frozen on the rigging, and there are reports of vessels missing."

I look anxiously at the Abbé, and I see that he is not smiling. I have read in books of ships blocked up in the ice till all on board have perished. I feel sick and giddy. I suppose I show it in my face.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" Monsieur Dupont cries out, "Mademoiselle, then, finds herself ill!" and the dreadful man has put the window open, and is fanning me with his brown-holland hat. "Sophie, my angel,

come to the succour of Mademoiselle; hold, then, thy *flacon* to her nose."

I manage to laugh—to say I am all right, and Madame La Peyre perceives my annoyance, and asks my tormentor to come and look at her farm-yard. I am rid of Monsieur Dupont for the present, but I cannot shake off the fear he has created. I can only see Captain Brand starving and frozen to death in the midst of icebergs.

That sentence of Monsieur Dupont's clouded the remainder of my birthday, though I tried to enter into the brightness of the little fête. Madame La Peyre wore a new cap in honour of the event, and there were grey instead of black ribbons in it; and Angélique arranged a most picturesque dessert—various dishes of delicious cakes and bon-bons, and a pyramid of apples decked with Spring flowers and sprigs of crimson beech.

After dinner Monsieur Dupont bowed to me and said, "To the health of Made-

moiselle, in the English fashion," and then clinked his glass against the Abbé's, and drank to me with another bow. They made such a business of it that I thought the glasses would be broken; but Monsieur Dupont looked very serious, and evidently thought he was doing the right thing, although he explained to me that this fashion in France was chiefly seen among *commis-voyageurs*.

After dinner he talked to me incessantly till he went away. The carriage, a most remarkable yellow vehicle, with a large black hood, came round at nine o'clock, and after a most profuse and notable leave-taking, the Duponts drove away, Monsieur putting out his head just as the carriage passed out of sight, to repeat his farewell words and gestures.

My head ached, and I was sorely tired; but still I had not been actually bored; as the Abbé had said, Monsieur Dupont carried his own amusement with him. There

was a sprightliness in his talk, and a quick perception of the nature of others, which gave him the power of being generally pleasant. He talked a good deal of himself and his wife, but always with a point of interest to his listeners. I felt so utterly incapable of filling such a *rôle*, that I was more merciful than I had previously been to Monsieur Dupont.

CHAPTER XII.

ANXIOUS DAYS.

THE days went by so slowly while we waited; but no news came of Captain Brand. One morning Madame La Peyre told me that the Abbé must go to Paris for a few days, and that as the carriage must take him to Yvetôt, if I chose I might meet it as it returned, and go on with Angélique to see Marie Touchet.

After breakfast the Abbé asked me to come to his study. His manner was so grave that I felt troubled; but he left me no time for anxiety.

"My dear child," he said, "I am going

to Paris on other business, but I am also going to see if some definite tidings cannot be gathered about Captain Brand. I did not tell you, because it seemed better to wait; but a letter from his London agent crossed mine the day after I wrote. This letter says the ship is long over-due, and that no tidings have been heard of it, or of the Captain. The agent writes to ascertain if we can give any information."

"Did you hear what Monsieur Dupont said?"

"Yes, yes, my child; but you must not look so scared and sad. Though I have not spoken before, I have seen your sadness, Gertrude. There are always plenty of these idle rumours. The agent goes on to say that the delay may be attributed to some contingency occasioned by the severe Winter."

"But then how long can this doubt last?"

He looked grave again, and I felt that he

tried to smile against his own conviction.

"You want to make me a prophet, my dear child. Let us hope that very soon indeed we may be called to welcome Captain Brand at Château Fontaine. But I have other news—a letter this morning tells me of the death of Captain Brand's mother. She has died suddenly, without a will. But as it appears she has derived her income solely from her son, this is not of much consequence, except that, as there are no other relatives, you are placed in a more responsible position."

I did not understand the Abbé: I was too sad. I had refused to go and live with this mother; and now she has died alone, perhaps,—evidently without one of her own people beside her.

I said good-bye to the Abbé, and then I went to find Angélique. I did not feel in spirits for our expedition, and I thought I would ask her to defer it. But looking down into the hall from the great square

gallery, I saw Angélique with an unusually happy face putting last touches to the packing of two baskets, offerings evidently for Marie Touchet.

I am still selfish then, or my first thought would not be to shut myself up, and brood over this anxiety—regardless of the disappointment both of Angélique and of Marie Touchet.

Seeing this I kept silence, and we started as soon as it was considered possible for the carriage to have deposited the Abbé at Yvetôt, and to have reached on its return the turn in the road leading over the hill to St. Arnould.

Angélique trudged along with a basket on each arm, broad, flat, open baskets, made of white wood shavings; one was covered with a snow-white cloth, and I fancy held butter and eggs; but in the other was a scarlet-combed live brown hen, held in bondage by a bright orange handkerchief fastened across the basket.

Angélique was in singularly gay spirits. She had not been so far from home for months; and she pointed out to me the tender green of the hawthorn leaves as we walked along the white, hedge-bordered road, and the green banks below, gay with blue lilies and gemmed with pink and blue and starry white flowers. From these hedges, and from the trees which at intervals rose from them, and stretched across the road, rose a perpetual chorus. The birds strained their tiny throats in praise of the exquisite Spring sunshine. Here and there the hedges gave place to a low stone fence; and stretches of corn-land appeared in place of the hedge-bordered meadows; then came a more intense melody from above, from the tiny brown bird poised liked a speck near the clouds. We found the carriage waiting, and the stout pair of grey Norman horses carried us rapidly up hill towards St. Arnould.

Just before we reached Marie's cottage, the road descended steeply; it had evidently been cut through a densely planted fir-wood, for the yellow banks were bare of herbage, and only varied by the protruding roots of the dark trees above, and occasional patches of heather, velvet-brown with last year's shrivelled bells, dotting the bright-hued sand.

I was looking up at this wood, and all at once I saw a man's face peering down at us from between the tree-trunks; but even while I looked it vanished.

"I should not like to come here in the dark, Angélique. How easily robbers could hide in that wood!"

"But Mademoiselle may be tranquil; there has never been a robbery here. The people of St. Arnould are very good and orderly, and besides, it is not often that strangers go there."

"It is all very well, but we have scarcely seen a house since we left Fontaine, and in

that thick wood robbers could hide themselves easily."

A sudden opening on the left brought us to a kind of gravel-pit, surrounded by the thick blue verdure of the pine-wood. In the centre, at some distance from the road, were two small cottages, with green doors and lattice windows. A vine spread its bare brown arms over the fronts of both cottages, and reached up even to the thatch above, where there was a colony of house-leek and stone-crop.

"This is Marie's cottage, Mademoiselle."

The carriage had stopped at the opening; the road seemed broken and stony beyond, and Angélique got out, and held the door for me. I felt a little disappointed. I had imagined a picturesque village grouped round a little church; these two lonely cottages, with their hard yellow background, were not specially attractive.

"Will Mademoiselle give herself the trouble of following me?"

Angélique went on across the broad space of yellow ground, and tapped at the door of the largest of the two cottages. She waited, but there was no answer, and then she rapped her knuckles harder against the green door. Still no answer came. Angélique's hand was on the latch, when I saw the window in the next cottage moving; it opened, and a very ugly woman's face appeared; it was a different kind of ugliness from Rosalie's—a broad misshapen face, but with honest, dull grey eyes, and no malice on its heavy, blue-lipped mouth.

"*Tiens*, Mesdames," the woman said—"is it, then, to see Marie Touchet that they are come, these ladies?"

"Berthe"—Angélique spoke as if the huge-faced woman was a child—"this is Mademoiselle from the Château, who, I told you, would come some day; come, Berthe, thou rememberest me, la mère

Angélique—what, then, has happened to Marie Touchet?"

There was a loud clattering of *sabots* as Berthe's ugly, vacant face left the window, and when the door opened, the space was filled by her huge squat figure; her great feet, cased in black *sabots*, were bare, and her apron, though clean, was full of rents; instead of a cap, her head was swathed in a pink handkerchief, with a little horn over each ear.

"*Plait-il?*" she said stolidly to Angélique, but she looked at me.

"How is Marie, and why is she locked in?"

Berthe shook her head.

"La mère Angélique knows Berthe is a dunce"—she looked hard at me while she spoke—"and yet she asks two things at once! *Ma foi*, what can a poor girl do?"

Berthe must surely be fifty; I began to think she was an idiot.

"Is Marie ill?" Angélique went back to the door and tried to open it.

"*Mon Dieu!*"—Berthe opens her mouth and eyes, and stares still harder at me.—"Will la mère Angélique give herself the patience to wait?"

She clatters along in her huge *sabots* to the little green door, and then, stretching up a brown hairy arm, she feels along the top of the door, and at last produces a key. She looks at it, and then at us; then, pushing one set of clumsy fingers in among her wisps of rough hair, she grins at last broadly.

"*Tenez*, Madame Angélique, this is what I am to say, if anyone inquires for Marie Touchet—she is not at her cottage. How shall she be there with her key outside? She is not at St. Arnould"—here she falters, and she looks first at one of us, and then at the other, to help her memory.

"She is at Caudebec, *bien*," says Angélique, and takes the key.

"No, no, no,"—Berthe shakes her head vehemently, and plants herself stubbornly in front of the closed door—"it is not so; that is not the message which Marie has taught Berthe to say, if anyone should come to see her from Château Fontaine." Then she begins again, in a dreamy, monotonous voice, like a child saying a lesson—"Marie is not at her cottage, nor at St. Arnould." I smile, but Angélique shakes her head; she sees that only our patience will help poor Berthe's straying wits. "She is not even at Caudebec—she is with Fifine, she is on the road to St. Wandrille. Aha!"—Berthe looks round in sudden triumph;—"our Fifine has a baby, and when Marie has seen that they are all right, she is coming back very soon, perhaps to-day, to Berthe."

"How long has she been gone, my poor girl?"

Angélique puts her hand on the great

rough woman's shoulder, and looks persuasive.

"See here," and Berthe points to six pins in front of her gown, "Marie has said she will be gone but six days, and she told Berthe to put in a pin for every day. *Mon Dieu!* there are six days; yes, yes, it is sure that Marie will come to-day."

She moves away, and Angélique unlocks the door. All the windows are closed, and as I follow her, the air feels horribly close.

"Mademoiselle will wait, will she not? —she had best not enter—" Angélique turns round, and stands in my way; "this room has been closed so long that it is unwholesome. I will just stay and air it, and leave the things I have brought for Marie, and then I will come to Mademoiselle."

I turn away, glad to escape. I had been so anxious to visit a French cottage, but not one that has been shut up for six

days. I go back to the carriage, and Berthe follows Angélique into Marie's room.

It is a lovely afternoon; there is just breeze enough to bring the fragrance of the pine-trees to where I sit. The scent sets me thinking of Mrs. Dayrell, she so loved it. At Merdon it was one of my amusements to collect fir-cones, and to dry them for Mrs. Dayrell's fire. She had so few pleasures that Madame La Peyre was always devising little enjoyments for her; and this was one.

It is a year since Mrs. Dayrell's death, and yet how vividly the terrible scene comes back as I sit waiting beside the gravel-pit! Poor dear, how she suffered! I can see now what was often so puzzling at Merdon, the likeness between myself and this poor self-willed woman. She saw it all through, and from her first knowledge of the marriage urged me to submit to my husband. If I had listened to her at Merdon

there would have been yet time, now it is too late. Captain Brand's forbearance seems to me to have been almost superhuman, but that is just the reason why he will not forgive; he cannot stoop to my level, he will never consent to have a wife he cannot trust, and he will never believe in me. If I could even say "I love you" with my whole heart, even then, perhaps, he would not believe me; and I could never say this —for I can never again deceive him. This thought often comes, and it brings with it intense pain. Although I am safely sheltered within the old-fashioned close carriage, I shrink back into a corner of it, and cover my eyes with my hand.

But next moment I am startled out of my sadness by the opening of the carriage door on the side farthest from the cottage.

It is Monsieur de Vaucresson who opens it, and as I sit staring in dumb terror he steps into the carriage, closes the door, and seats himself opposite to me.

"Ah! I am happy at last," he says.

For an instant I cannot speak, but I am not long dumb.

"Monsieur de Vaucresson, you ought not to come here. You must go away at once. I told you distinctly I never wished to see you again."

I look at him severely, but he does not laugh in his teasing, mocking way; he is very sad, and I fancy even humble. I move to open the door—he puts out his hand imploringly.

"Ah! Madame, can you then refuse to listen to me just for a moment? Your nature is different from mine; you are cold, and you can love one month, and forget the next; with me it is different. Never till I saw you did I know what love meant. Never can I forget the love which you have created in my heart. Yes, you have created it," he says impetuously, "and you are bound to listen to your own crea-

tion; you shall hear me say I love you—even if the next moment you trample on my heart."

His words sound false, and yet the voice in which he speaks has reality in it. I look up, and I see tears in his eyes. I tremble, and yet I am not really moved.

"Monsieur de Vaucresson," I say calmly, "you are giving us both needless pain. I —I do not love you—I know now that I never really loved you, it was only foolish vanity—I wish you to leave me at once."

He gives a little start, and then he frowns.

"You are not prudent, my charming friend. You should not defy a man when you cannot help listening to him."

"You are mistaken, Monsieur; Angélique is close by in that cottage, and Madame La Peyre's coachman is on the box."

"I know everything, my friend—ah, I am your true friend, though you will not believe it; I know also that you will keep

quiet. Baptiste is so deaf that you can never make him hear as long as I choose to keep the carriage door shut." He puts his hand on the door nearest me.

At this, instead of feeling frightened, a strong determined courage came to me.

"You can of course stay here, Monsieur, if you are resolved to forget all courtesy, and to remain where you are not wanted; but I refuse to speak to you again."

"Listen, Gertrude. You do nót, you cannot be so romantic as to think that this sudden meeting has come by chance—listen, and do not provoke me by that affected air of indifference. You are angry with me, and I do not wonder—ah! you begin to listen now, *bon*—you would have a just right to be angry if I had been as faithless as I have been made to appear after you left me so suddenly in the garden. I wrote letter after letter. I haunted the Château for days. You wrote to me, but what then? I recognised fear and

compulsion in the dear little note, which I yet kissed and placed next my heart, which is there still. Then I heard of your illness, and in despair I travelled, I gambled —what will you?—I indulged in a hundred mad follies, to quiet my torments and my anxiety.

"The other day in Paris suddenly I hear that English merchant ships have perished on the northern coast of America, and I remember to have heard that your husband was bound there. Well, Gertrude, what do I do? I say to myself, 'There is my first love, my dear little friend, perhaps a widow, and even her English ideas will no longer refuse my friendship;' I go to Château Fontaine. I go there—ah! my sweet friend, your face tells me you have not known of my visit; the Père de Nivières is a very clever and discreet priest, and I see well that he is on guard, and that I must be wary and watch for his absence, if I mean to take you at unawares, so I return

to Yvetôt. I know that the Abbé has already stayed a long time in this country, and that he must soon return to Paris.

" This morning, as I sit in my room, I see the Abbé pass by in the carriage. No doubt he goes to Paris. *Bon*—an idea arrives, and I seize it. I know well how deaf and how stupid is Baptiste, and when the Abbé leaves the carriage I get in, and Baptiste, doubting nothing, drives me to the point where he stops to wait for you. Then I descend, and I arrive as from the opposite quarter in front of Baptiste, and I say, '*Holà, mon cher*, whom do you wait for?' and then the wise and discreet Baptiste, when at last he hears me, says, 'I wait for Mademoiselle and la mère Angélique, and I conduct them to the cottage of Marie Touchet.' See what a transparent little mystery! Then I climb into the wood and hurry on as fast as possible, and at last I see Angélique go into the cottage, and I find my sweet treasure here—And

now," he flings himself on his knees, "my treasure will reward me; she will say just once, in her sweet, delicious voice, 'Eugène, I love thee.' I do not ask for much, my Gertrude."

I cannot speak; I tremble with shame and anger; I cannot escape while he kneels there. Oh, how could I have dreaded this man's influence? I feel that I loathe and detest him.

"Monsieur,"—at last my voice comes back—"if you will not spare me, spare yourself; do not make me say that I dislike you and shrink from you."

He rises up quickly and bursts into a torrent, first of adoring flattery, and then of reproach. I try not to listen, but I feel crushed with shame, and choked with the angry replies I long to make, and yet I know that silence is my only safe weapon now.

I am bitterly punished, and perhaps the keenest part of my shame lies in the

thought that, for this weak, vain man's admiration, I despised and deceived that other good man. I may never love Captain Brand, but I can always reverence him. Which is the real Eugène de Vaucresson?—the merry boy I dreamed into an idol, or this man, so insatiable in his vanity that he will run any risk to gratify it?—for every word that he has said shows vanity, not true love. Even when he taunts me with my faithlessness I cannot feel that he really loves me.

Presently he pauses, and his tone changes.

"You are thinking of a new marriage, Madame; is it not so?" he said. I am surprised, and he goes on fast—"You heard what I said just now; I tell you that you are a widow."

For a few moments I am chilled and awe-struck by the word, but then I recover and force myself to answer.

"You have no right to ask such a ques-

tion; but, even were your news true, Monsieur, I have no wish to marry."

He shrugs his shoulders with impatience.

"You mistake me, my charming friend; I am not pleading for myself. But surely, as a widow, you cannot object to a renewal of our friendship. Give me your hand in pledge, and we will forget and forgive; will we not, my Gertrude?"

He has seated himself again, but, before he can stop me, I open the carriage-door and spring out. I have nearly reached the door of the cottage, panting with my haste, when Angélique opens it. I suppose my agitated face frightens her. She looks round to see what has moved me. I glance towards the carriage, but it stands empty; the door is closed, and deaf Baptiste is still sound asleep on the box.

While Angélique says good-bye to Berthe I take counsel with myself, and resolve only to tell the Abbé of this meeting with Eugène de Vaucresson.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOOKING BACK.

IN my journal I find a long entry, recording my journey home after that eventful meeting, and my angry feelings respecting the Count. But what is actual in this life? I do not know. It seems to me that we are the sport of circumstances; that which seems a black misfortune becomes of a far lighter hue when some deeper loss falls beside it; and an event of much importance to-day is slight—trivial even—in our estimation, to that which happens on the morrow.

And so it is with me to-day. Now that the sad certainty of bereavement has fallen

on my life, my heart feels closed to minor trials. I almost smile, even in this aching sorrow, to think how large a place at the time my anger with the Count held in my thoughts. Now he seems to me only an insolent foolish boy, and I feel a grief-stricken, full-grown woman.

Well, I will begin at the beginning. We were expecting the Abbé home again. He had been away a month, and had written me most kind and cheering letters. He had been indefatigable in making inquiry, but had not gained any definite tidings. In his last letter to Madame La Peyre, he said he was going to England for a few days, in consequence of some information which had reached him. He did not say what this information was, but the letter ended thus:

"I do not suppose I shall write again, but you may expect me a week after you receive this. I will get a carriage at Caudebec, and drive over. I take this journey

because it seems to me that nothing can be so bad for our dear child as suspense; any certainty is preferable."

I wondered whether the Abbé meant me to read that sentence, it seemed like a doom; but I did not say so, as I gave the letter back to Madame La Peyre, and she plainly read it differently.

"Perhaps he may bring Monsieur le Capitaine with him," Madame says.

"Perhaps;" and then I wish the week, and more than the week, was over, and that I knew the end.

That week seemed to go, oh! so slowly! and yet the time itself did not hang heavily. I had many friends in the village now. There was the miller's wife, who used to chatter my head nearly off when I paid her charming mill a visit. When I was not too tired, her delight was to take me up to the top story and show me the view over the Seine; and then when I came down with my black skirts powdered with flour,

she used to run away for a brush, and come back screaming with laughter, a couple of pears in one hand, which Mademoiselle was to eat while she brushed. But last year's pears were dry and withered, and the fresh ones in the Roussel orchard were not ripe. So to-day the miller's wife had given me instead a *galette*, that she said was delicious, but which I could not succeed in swallowing. When Madame Roussel turned away to scold her ugly maid Marie, I flung the *galette* to a long-legged black pig which had been curiously eyeing me.

I came home late and tired, and found Angélique at the gate.

"*Tenez!*" she said—how bright a smile came over her dear brown face when she saw me!—"I feared Mademoiselle was faint or ill, and Rosalie and I have made all ready for Monsieur l'Abbé, so I came to see for my child."

I was so tired that I had taken her arm,

and she patted my hand tenderly as she spoke.

I had meant to keep my resolution a secret, but just now I felt drawn very close to Angélique.

"You dear old nurse," I said softly, "suppose anyone comes with the Abbé and takes me away from Château Fontaine. Will you come too?"

A struggle appeared in her face. I saw her lips quiver so that I had no longer strength to watch them—oh! how could I leave these two dear loving women and go away with a man I felt afraid of? I leaned on Angélique's shoulder and sobbed.

"*Allons*, Mademoiselle," she says briskly, but I saw that she rubbed her eyes vigorously with the knuckles of her other hand. "*Allons*, what will Monsieur l'Abbé say if Mademoiselle has red eyes when he comes home." A little pause, and then she says, "Mademoiselle will be brave and

good, and then whatever happens she will find happiness; it always lies on the road where we least look for it."

I cannot answer, I suppose I am weak and over-done, but I cry unrestrainedly when we reach the Château. I kiss Angélique and run away and bathe my eyes. Not too soon. Almost before I have changed by dress and arranged myself for dinner, comes the well-known grate over the stony drive, which bespeaks an arrival.

I make as much haste as I can, but as I reach the staircase gallery I see the Abbé going into the salon. His back is towards me, but I see the reflection of his tidings in Madame's sad, scared face.

I do not know what I said; I found myself beside the Abbé, grasping his arm with both hands. He put his hand on my head. "May God bless my child!" He spoke so tenderly that a certainty of evil settled on my heart. "My Gertrude, there is no definite proof, there is nothing certain—

but I fear we shall never see our dear friend on earth again."

Then he placed me gently in a chair, and there was a long silence, only broken by the sobs of Madame La Peyre. I could not cry—my heart was frozen, and checked words and tears.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOPING AGAINST HOPE.

WHAT weary days and nights have gone by! The Abbé and Madame La Peyre have given up all hope, and I suppose I ought to yield it up too.

I can see the Abbé thinks I am giving way to self-will in this want of submission, and doubtless he is right. He has always been right before. I hoped I had learned by this time how much safer I was when I did not try to guide my own life; but it will be the same to the end—I shall be one person in theory, and another when temptation calls for action. The only weight on my side now is, that I do not think Angélique is altogether hopeless. She will not give

her opinion against Monsieur l'Abbé, but she is silent; and a few days ago, when Madame La Peyre said she supposed I should have my new dress trimmed with crape, Angélique stood waiting for my order with a most inscrutable look on her face.'

The Abbé has told me that for some time to come things must remain exactly as they are. He said that, as Captain Brand was hurried away on this last voyage before he could take any steps about the marriage, his property belongs to me. I cried out against this; but the Abbé says there is no alternative, and that probably Captain Brand's will has anticipated this event, only when the necessary time shall have elapsed, I shall have to go to London and see the lawyer. He added that he thought it would be well for me to remain under his sister's care at present; afterwards, if I wished it, I could return to Tasmania.

I hurry over all this, for it added misery

to my sorrow. I had always shrunk from Captain Brand's undeserved generosity; it was terrible to benefit by his loving care now when I could never give even duty in exchange.

I had already saved quite a little hoard out of the allowance transmitted for me to Madame La Peyre. I felt oppressed at the idea of further riches. I could not sleep that night; and I resolved to find out Angélique's real opinion.

It was raining so very fast that probably we should have a long in-door day to spend. I have learned in this long waiting the help and comfort that are to be found in the mere breathing of outside air, and I shrank dismayed from a weary day in the dark old house.

When I left the Abbé's study, I went down to Angélique's den. For a wonder she was there, with spectacles on, darning a pair of the Abbé's black silk stockings.

"You poor old dear, you will blind your-

self! You can give me those stockings to mend; you know I glory in doing anything for my darling *père*."

Angélique shook her head. "No, no; this is too tedious work. Mademoiselle: can knit some silk mittens for the Winter for Monsieur l'Abbé. Ah! Mademoiselle, look how nearly all the leaves have fallen; Winter will be here directly." I look out of window.

Yes, it is true; we are in the last days of October; the days till to-day have been bright, and full of warm sunshine, although the evenings have given warning that the noonday heat was not real Summer come back. This glow is only like the bloom that we sometimes see on the cheek of a woman of middle years, the last flower before chill age asserts its final sway; and this remembrance of the time of year, although, indeed, I have been counting the weeks too carefully to need such a remembrance, makes my heart still heavier.

I sit down, and watch Angélique's nimble fingers, as she deftly sends her long needle in and out of the fine silken web. I forget my purpose of getting something to do.

Presently Angélique looks up.

"Mademoiselle is very thoughtful."

"You mean I am very idle. I am like the tiresome, lazy girl you had such trouble with at Merdon."

Angélique sighs.

"What are you sighing for? You surely do not mean that you liked me better then? Why, I try to be good chiefly to please you, you naughty woman!"

"Mademoiselle, I must answer truly, or I must be silent. I think I have always loved Mademoiselle for herself. It makes me happier to see Mademoiselle more peaceful, because I know she is then happy; but sometimes I wish I could see her as gay and bright as she used to be."

I find myself crying.

"Angélique," I say, after a little, "you

make a mistake between happiness and content. It is not likely I can ever be what I call happy again."

"What is it that Mademoiselle wishes to make her happy? Will she not tell me?" And the dear woman looks at me so wistfully that I believe, if I asked for the topmost brick of Château Fontaine, she would begin to inquire for a long ladder.

"I can never have it now, so there is no use in talking of it." And as I speak, it seems to me that my idea of happiness is hazy and indefinite; it is far more a longing for a future which may possibly exist, than a desire for a known good.

Angélique darns on a little longer, and I still watch her fingers and idly wonder whether bones will ever show in my knuckles, instead of dimples, and whether my finger-nails will ever become ribbed like Angélique's.

How vain and silly I am still: why not wonder instead whether I shall ever get

that serene peace in my heart which shines out of Angélique's eyes, and brightens what would without it be a hard ascetic face?

All at once she puts down her work and looks at me very earnestly.

"Mademoiselle has then decided that Monsieur, her husband, will never come back again?"

I feel the colour rush over my face under those searching eyes; but I must undeceive Angélique.

"I want to know presently what you think; but listen. I long to see Captain Brand for just one or two things; but the happiness I have dreamed of at times in my life is not connected with the thought of him. I am much happier here with you and Madame and Monsieur l'Abbé than I could be"—I stopped, there was no need to betray my resolution to Angélique, so I said—"elsewhere. You know that Captain Brand has been very good —I cannot tell you how good he has

been to me, and he is of course my husband"—I have wanted to say this to her a long, long time; Angélique has so much sense that she will accept my change of ideas without asking questions—"but, Angélique, will you tell me honestly whether you agree with the Abbé, or whether you think the ship may be heard of. If he is right, then it seems to me that—that I am a widow, and that I ought to dress and be like a widow."

Angélique does not look at me as she answers.

"Monsieur l'Abbé is much wiser than I am, Mademoiselle, my opinion is of no value; but it may be that dress has not much to do with sorrow. Mademoiselle has very seldom smiled since first the bad news came, and she wears mourning still."

She went back to her work; she looked, I thought, disappointed. I stood puzzling out her meaning; she thought then that, as I had refused to consider myself

Captain Brand's wife while he lived, it was a mere sentiment to pass myself off as his widow, now that there was no chance of his claiming wifely duty from me. But I had not finished all I had come to say.

"I said I was contented here; but that is not true. I feel like the idle boy in the spelling-book. Ah, I suppose you know nothing of that dear old book, Angélique. Everyone here has something special to do —is a part of the household; but, if I went away to-morrow, who would miss me?" I tried to speak steadily; this thought had been growing a long time, but I had never got courage to utter it; the idea even of leaving Château Fontaine was so sad.

"But it is the contrary," she said earnestly, "everybody would miss Mademoiselle; she brings the sunshine into the house."

"And just now you said I had been dull since the Spring. No, no, Angélique; besides, sunshine is not always wanted. Constant sunshine would scorch and wither,

and there would be neither fruit nor flowers. I study with M. l'Abbé, and I like my studies, but they only benefit me. I cannot see what real use I am of to any living creature. I know you are all fond of me, and so are Berthe, and Madame Roussel."

"Mademoiselle is unjust to herself. Everyone loves Mademoiselle dearly. Madame Roussel told me on Sunday she counts the days between the visits of Mademoiselle; and as to poor Berthe, she cries when she speaks of her. Poor Berthe! She is very lonely now, for Marie Touchet has grown so infirm that she is gone away to live with Fifine and Monsieur Léon. *Tenez*—and Mademoiselle is smiling?—it is no smiling matter to our poor Berthe."

"I am smiling because of a new thought that came to me in the night. Do you know, Angélique, I shall ask Monsieur l'Abbé if I may adopt Berthe; she is not more than twice as old as I am, and I shall

try to teach her, and make her more sensible, if I can."

Angélique smiled, but she looked doubtful. "Mademoiselle, it is very difficult to teach where the good God has not given understanding. Madame has tried, and I have tried also, but"—here she gave such a deep, sobbing sigh that I could hardly believe it came from my self-controlled Angélique, and I knew that she was thinking of Rosalie—"but we cannot succeed; still Mademoiselle is younger, and more clever; only it is a long way to St. Arnould."

"I have thought of that, you dear old thing; I could not do it as long as Berthe lives at St. Arnould, but old Mathieu will lodge Berthe, if he is paid for it, and if Madame permits him to take a lodger."

I thought that at last I had found a way of spending Captain Brand's money which he would have approved.

"Mademoiselle will hear what Monsieur

l'Abbé says; it is a kind thought of Mademoiselle, and it would be very good for Berthe, and"—Angelique stopped, and then she went on with an effort—"it may be—for Berthe is good and docile—that she will not be so difficult to teach as one who is forward; but still I think Mademoiselle will find it tedious to persevere, and when she can see Berthe every day, there will be no longer the excitement of going to see her."

"You read me like a book!" I patted her shoulder, for she looked timid at having said so much. "But even suppose that I do get tired, I shall have done Berthe no harm. I mean to try to teach her to read, and to keep her hair neat, and to be cleaner; for you know, Angélique, that, though she is so devout, Berthe is not at all nice in her ways. I expect old Mathieu's example will be extremely good for her, although he does take such huge pinches of snuff."

"Mathieu is very good," said Angélique, with a sigh, "and I think he will like to have some one with him always, for he wants some one to listen to his stories, and Berthe likes listening better than talking."

I had no peace till I found the Abbé; it was wonderful how much happier I felt myself under the excitement of my project, only I wanted it all settled at once. I was disappointed when the Abbé referred me to Madame La Peyre, and advised me to think over the plan for a week before I mentioned it either to Mathieu or Berthe.

"But why, *mon père?* Surely I have made up my mind, and do you not think it good for me to have a decided occupation?"

He smiled. "I do not think you are idle; you are cultivating your mind, and you are always doing something for Madame La Peyre or for me."

"Not much, I think; but I see," I

laughed, "Monsieur l'Abbé is jealous. He thinks that when I really have a child of my own—for of course Berthe will be my child now—I shall neglect him."

"It is not that, naughty child," the Abbé said, with the sweet fatherly smile that seemed always to go straight to my heart; "but, Gertrude, there is a far more serious reason. I do not disapprove—on the contrary, I think it may be useful both to you and to your *protégée* that you should do this; but you are very young still, and it is probable that, when this mourning is over, and you mix in the world, you will marry, and then——"

"I shall never mix in the world, and certainly I shall never marry."

The Abbé looked at me with the same peculiar expression I have so often seen in Angélique. At Merdon it always puzzled me in her; now I read in it a gentle wonder that, after so many mistakes, I could feel sure about myself.

"Very well, *mon père;* then you will allow me to adopt Berthe, if I promise that, in any case, she shall always be provided for?"

"Yes, if you will make your promise a certainty; but that matter is best settled by a lawyer, and, indeed, for the present nothing can be done of that kind."

"No—but in the meantime I may speak to Mathieu and Berthe." I felt very sad as I said this; I saw the Abbé would not let me cling to hope. I fancy my sadness must have shown itself in my face, his next words were so tender.

"Yes, yes, my child, you shall do what you wish; come with me to Eugénie, and we will arrange everything; she will be your authority with Mathieu; and, if you like, we will drive to St. Arnould as soon as the rain ceases."

CHAPTER XV.

MY PROTÉGÉE.

IN two days Berthe was installed in the cottage with so many green doors and windows. Madame La Peyre and Angélique seemed to find great pleasure in furnishing one of the empty rooms for Berthe out of a *grenier* filled with lumber at the top of one of those corkscrew staircases at the Château. Everyone entered kindly and lovingly into my plan except Rosalie; she was crosser than ever—she absolutely scowled at me; and on the day when Berthe was expected to arrive, she told me, when she brought my coffee, that la mère Angelique had more than enough to

do already without fussing over "les manies de Mademoiselle."

Poor Rosalie! she was plainly jealous, and it came to me with a sharp pang of regret that until Angélique's unconscious revelation the other day, I have so seldom thought of, or tried to realise the loving sorrow her unhappy daughter must cause her. But I suppose Angélique accepts it, as she accepts all else, as God's will; and it may be her cheerful acceptance of this and other trials that makes her what she is. I wish I could care for Rosalie as I already care for Berthe, but Madame La Peyre has always advised me to have as little to do with Rosalie as possible. She says that any attempt to overcome her evident dislike to me will probably only increase it. She thinks there is no doubt this poor thing is jealous of Angélique's fondness for me.

Madame La Peyre, Angélique, and I went down to the cottage next morning,

and Berthe's delight was good to see. She showed us every article in her room with bursts of laughter; she clapped her great hands together, then struck them violently on her sides, and could hardly be brought to listen while Madame La Peyre explained the uses of a pail and a broom and a scrubbing-brush. My heart sank a little as I watched her; I felt that Angélique was right. I had certainly not realised the difficulty of my undertaking, or how very much of a female Friday in her uncouthness and ignorance I had planted in the quiet cottage of the old concierge.

I wonder if I have done wisely? Berthe is good and devout, and she would be as likely to love God ignorant as when she gets better taught—is it only for my own selfish ends that I have brought her here? I seem always to be doubting myself; but, even while I stand doubting, Madame La Peyre gives me comfort.

"You must have been very sad and

lonely without Marie Touchet," she says in her sweet, loving way to my gaping, staring *protégée*.

Berthe stares, and a look of stolid misery clouds her face.

"*Dame*," she says, "the weeks have gone, and the days and nights, but Berthe does not know them—what can she know without Marie? Berthe did not know when to go to mass, unless by the market carts the day before. Berthe saw a sick rabbit creep into its hole, and one day Berthe thought she would like to creep into the wood and never come out again. Berthe cannot cook, she cannot sew when Marie is not there to tell her." Tears rolled down her broad face.

After this, I had no more doubts. I often came back from my daily visit to the cottage, wearied out of patience by my pupil's dense stupidity and neglect of her common duties; but Berthe was so uniformly humble and good-tempered that I

always felt ashamed of my want of patience. Mathieu, too, was on her side. He seemed to consider her in the light of a faithful dog, and on one occasion he actually took a journey to Rouen, and left the cottage and all his duties in charge of poor awkward Berthe.

So the days passed by, and, although I could not forget my suspense, I had no longer the same dull blank in my life. I knew almost everyone in the village, and often got as far as the Maison Blanche, and paid a visit to handsome, stern-looking Madame Vagnon. I admired this woman, but I sometimes found there her sister, the lame lace-mender, Henriette. I had grown to love the little old woman, so like a withered leaf; her face looked suffering, but she was blithe and merry as a bird. When I found Henriette with Madame Vagnon, I always came home in good spirits.

There had been some talk of our going

to Rouen at the beginning of the year, but I always kept silent; it seemed to me if we left Château Fontaine, news might come during our absence, and there would be delay. The weather was growing less severe, and I sometimes went down to give Berthe her reading-lesson before our mid-day breakfast, for at Château Fontaine Madame La Peyre suited her habits to the Abbé's.

I came in one morning less tired than usual. As I began to go upstairs, Madame La Peyre came into the hall from the *salle-à-manger*.

"I was coming to look for thee, my child."

She often came to meet me, and she often said these words; but to-day, as I met her and kissed her, I saw tears on her eyelashes, and I heard a new tone in her voice.

"What is it? Oh, please tell me!" I said, in quick terror. "Is there news?"

She took my hand, and drew me with her into the room. The Abbé sat at the breakfast-table, but he was not eating. His face was full of anxious sorrow.

"Does she know?" he said.

"She guesses. I have not told her;" and then dear Madame La Peyre placed herself between me and the Abbé, and sat holding my hand.

"There is news of the ship," the Abbé said; "it has perished. Many of the crew have been saved, but they seem to have suffered fearfully while the ship lay blocked in ice." He stopped, but I could not speak; I only kept looking at him, dreading what his next words might be. "The Captain has suffered most of all, and it is better to tell you at once, Gertrude, there is scarcely any hope of his recovery."

I felt too much stunned to understand.

"But why did we not hear this sooner?"

"I fancy we have heard with as little delay as possible. These suffering men

could not rescue themselves, and it appears that, in trying to reach a supposed point of communication, the brave Captain, who undertook the task, suffered most severely in his fearful journey across trackless fields of ice. When at last succour was found, the poor creatures were so helpless and disabled that they had to be nursed into life before they could give an account of themselves. This news seems to have reached London only a few days ago."

"Then we shall have more news soon?"

I felt that I was speaking in a hard, calm voice, as if Captain Brand's life or death were indifferent to me. The Abbé looked surprised. I wished I could show some feeling, but it was impossible.

"We shall have, I fear, very sad news in a few days, but still it will be better to know the truth, will it not, my child?"

"Yes."

The Abbé sat in silence a few moments, and then he went away and left me with Madame La Peyre.

She clasped her arms round me. "My poor darling!" she said, in a soothing voice. I kissed her, but I could not show any of the sorrow that was swelling my heart. Why should Madame La Peyre sorrow so much for me? I had never done or said anything to evince a change of feeling towards Captain Brand. She could not have penetrated into my heart, and seen there feelings which I did not know of myself. And I could not seem to join in her sorrow, not one tear would come to ease the dreadful weight at my heart.

I soon made an excuse to leave Madame La Peyre. I said I would go and lie down. I crept upstairs feebly; all strength had gone out of me, and I almost fell down on my bed. There I lay, cold and tearless, gazing on the two pictures I drew, which seemed to stand actually before my eyes—my last parting with him, and he risking his life to save his crew. I felt that I could not long bear this suffering;

it did not feel like grief, it was so much more awful. I could laugh more easily than I could cry. I thought of him with timid reverence, of all his goodness to me; and then with sudden, sharp agony, as I tried to realise the suffering he must have undergone in his efforts to save his companions. He had lived his whole life for others, and he had given it up at last in their service. Well, why should I sorrow for him now? The resolution I had made so tardily could not have benefited him. What sympathy could such a nature as his have found in mine? And yet his great and noble love had so glorified me, and gifted me with qualities I did not possess, that he had dreamed of finding happiness with me.

"Ah, well!" I said, in my tearless agony; "then, instead of sorrow, I should feel joy —joy that he has been suffered to escape me. How can I feel one real regret that he has been taken away from such a creature as I am?"

But this mood was too high-pitched for reality. I had not strength to keep to such self-abnegation, and, as I summoned up every meeting with him, and tried to recall every look and word, my heart suddenly melted, and seemed as if it would dissolve in the great passion of tears that overwhelmed me. All through these months I had multiplied fences and restraints; I had tried to choke the smallest outlet of sympathy towards him; and now by a sudden instinctive revelation, I knew that I had been doing this of late consciously—and the mighty stream of feeling, so long checked and kept out of my own sight, at one impetuous leap burst through all my dykes and fences, and cleared my mental sight.

I sat weeping a long, long time, but I was soothed; I grieved still, deeply, humbly; but it was a happier sorrow, for I felt that he would have been satisfied if he knew how I mourned him.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT LAST.

THE Winter has passed away, and the stern cold silence of out-door life is once more gone with it. The birds seem to spend all the morning in telling one another their adventures during the long months that have passed since they left our woods. Angélique smiled and shook her head when I said this. She maintains that if I get up early enough I shall hear the birds sing a lovely hymn of praise, and that after this they begin to gossip and quarrel over nest-building, and feeding their young.

I am standing on the steps listening to this cheerful colony, for the birds do seem

so much gayer and happier than people are. They have fewer griefs. Madame La Peyre comes out, and joins me.

"Art thou listening to the birds, Gertrude; I believe they know thee, and give thee an extra welcome."

"And yet they do not love me as well as they love Angélique. At Merdon I used to think the pigeons and farm-yard creatures loved her, but here the birds are always flying round her when she goes across the park."

Madame La Peyre makes no answer, and, silence being a very unusual habit with her, I look quickly at her. She is gazing at me with such a happy face. I have not seen so much brightness in her sweet old eyes for months. I am so glad to see her happy, and I say so as I kiss her. She puts her soft arms round me, and says into my ear:

"Does my child remember what the Abbé said last week?"

I cannot understand her; she seems to have forgotten her usual sweet sympathy. I am as hasty as ever now and then, and I draw a little away from my dear old friend. The Abbé had said that, if no news came of Captain Brand by my nineteenth birthday, I must go to London and see the lawyer who had the arrangement of my husband's affairs.

We had heard again that there was even less hope of his recovery, but that was about Christmas; and since then, in the utter silence that followed, even I had begun to feel that it was useless to cherish hope. But this giving up had deepened my sorrow, and I wondered at Madame La Peyre's strange want of perception.

"Thou dost not ask questions, my Gertrude. Have I, then, been mistaken all this time?"

The blood seemed to rush suddenly to my temples, and yet I shivered with cold.

"Oh, Madame!" I cried out, "tell me quickly."

She put her arm round me again.

"We will go in-doors, my child; thou art not prepared——"

"No, no, no; I will hear it here, at once."

I grasped her two hands and held her fast.

"Well, then," she said, entreatingly, "my child must free me; I cannot tell her while I am held so tightly."

"Pardon; you see how naughty I am."

"Yes, yes, but we understand," said Madame La Peyre; and she pulled a letter out of her pocket and gave it to me.

I read it over and over, but I did not seem to understand it. It was written to the Abbé, and signed "George Brand."

At last I went away from Madame La Peyre and leaned against the wall of the Château, and, having thus steadied myself, I was able to gather in the sense of the words. Captain Brand had recovered, and had begun his journey home soon after the

last account reached us—which explained the long silence which had followed. But he had undertaken this journey before he was equal to the task, and, in an out-of-the-way part of Canada, he had been struck down with low fever. He had lain there for weeks, and, when at last he recovered, he had re-commenced his journey by very slow stages, more than once stopped altogether by a return of weakness. He had at last reached London; he was now at Hâvre, and he wrote to know if he could present himself at Château Fontaine.

I stopped; I felt as if I must give utterance to some of the glad thanksgiving that filled my heart. He was safe, and he was coming to me! I went on to the end of the letter; my heart seemed suddenly to stand still, all joy faded, and I shrank into myself in an agony of shame; and—yes, I was obliged to feel it—bitter disappointment. The letter finished with these words—"Perhaps you will kindly explain

to my ward, Miss Stewart, that it is necessary I should see her once, as there are matters of business which she alone can decide, and yet which ought to be decided with as little delay as possible. The interview shall be short, and I wish you, Monsieur, to be present at it."

I folded up the letter, and gave it to Madame La Peyre.

"What is it then, my child? I thought —ah, *mon Dieu*, art thou not then happy at last, my little one?"

"I am very glad and very happy that Captain Brand is safe," I forced my lips into a smile—"and I hope the Abbé has written to say he can come to Château Fontaine."

"Yes, yes, he is writing; he did not think to wait for thy consent; he knew—we all knew, dearest child—the joy that thou wouldest feel to see thy good husband."

Ah! it was torture to hear this; no

agony that I ever suffered had been anything like it; my repentance had then come too late, and the love I once had was mine no longer. His letter said so.

"Madame," I said—I could not look at her as I spoke—"you mistake; Captain Brand speaks of me as his ward, he no longer considers himself my husband."

She was silent a little while, and then she opened the letter and read it.

"Courage, my child—" she came up and kissed me on both cheeks—"but that letter is written in ignorance of your changed feelings. When I shall have had the pleasure of a few minutes' talk with Monsieur le Capitaine, we shall see whether he will talk about Mademoiselle Stewart, and whether," she added mischievously, "he will require the Abbé's presence at this interview."

But at this my wits came back—

"Madame," I said, "I do not think I have ever confessed to any changed feeling

in the way you mean towards Captain Brand. I respect him, I love him for his goodness, and I have learned to loathe my own ingratitude and my pride; if he had wished to consider me as his wife, I was ready to try to make amends for all my bad behaviour to him; but it seems to me that there are two people to be thought of; you only consider me, but I think of Captain Brand. We have not met for more than two years; when he went away he was firmly resolved to get the marriage set aside. We cannot tell that this has not been effected, and finding himself free, Captain Brand has very likely formed another attachment, and wishes to marry some one else."

I do not know how I managed to say all this; it was very hard, but I said it as if it were an established fact. Madame La Peyre took one of my hands, placed it in her arm, and began to walk up and down the terrace.

"Gertrude"—there was such an earnest feeling in her voice that it thrilled through me—"thou hast not dealt quite openly with me."

I suppose I was too overwrought to withstand her. All my brave resolution melted.

"Forgive me," I sobbed, "but I did not mean to deceive; I did not know I should be disappointed, I meant to try to atone for the past."

"Then thou wilt let me tell the dear husband,"—she stopped short, and almost hugged me in her delight. If I had not been so sad, I should have smiled at her enjoyment.

"No, Madame; and unless you promise me this, I shall go to the Abbé and tell him that I refuse to see Captain Brand."

I was surprised at my own determined manner, and it evidently startled Madame La Peyre. She looked thoroughly disappointed. She tried persuasions, coaxing,

and at last tears. I found these hard to stand against; but the thought of Captain Brand kept me firm; and at last I got her to take my view of the matter.

"But thou wilt grant me this, my well-beloved Gertrude," she said at last, when I believe she was fairly worn out by the long discussion, "if, on seeing Captain Brand, he tells thee the marriage is valid, and cannot be broken through, then I may tell him how thou has sorrowed for him."

"If he tells me that, Madame, I shall tell him I am going to try to be a good wife to him. And—and you may tell him what you like." I felt confused and restless to get away. "But you are tired of talking, and so am I, and there is no use in supposing."

I laughed, and nodded, and ran away down the steps at a pace which I knew was beyond Madame La Peyre. I went on faster and faster. I wanted to be alone. As I reached Mathieu's cottage, I looked away,

fearing Berthe might come out and claim my help to rectify some of the daily mistakes which seemed to make a perpetual fog of her life. But as I passed, my name was called, not by Berthe, but by the Abbé.

"Madame said you were writing," I said nervously.

"Yes, I have written, my child. I thought Captain Brand would wish to come as soon as possible, and Mathieu has taken the letter, and he will catch the steamer as it passes the village, and go on to Hâvre to Captain Brand at his hotel; and if he is willing to come, he will bring him back to-night."

"To-night! Is it possible?" I felt stunned by this sudden news.

"There is nothing in that." He shrugged his shoulders at my wondering face. "The Captain takes the train to Bolbec, and at Bolbec he takes a carriage and two horses, and by that means he will reach Château Fontaine to-night."

"Shall I see him to-night?" I think I spoke quite as much to myself as to the Abbé.

"No, he will come late, and you and Eugénie will have gone to bed. After this sudden excitement, you will both be better in the morning."

Again a terrible fear of betrayal seemed almost to choke me.

"Monsieur l'Abbé"—I said hastily, and then stopped, because I had no idea how to go on.

"Yes, my child." His voice had such a sad gentleness in it that, in spite of my confusion, I looked up. No, the Abbé would not betray me. But the weight at my heart felt doubled all at once, for I saw what he thought.

"You—you—understand that letter as I do. Captain Brand comes simply to tell me that the marriage is not valid; and that for the future he is to be considered only as my guardian."

"Yes, my dear child," said the Abbé; and as he bowed his head, I thought I saw tears in his eyes.

"Thank you, *mon père*; I knew what you would say. Will you, please, tell dear Madame La Peyre what you think."

I did not wait for his answer; but hurried on across the planks to the other side of the river.

CHAPTER XVII.

BERTHE'S TROUBLE.

I STAYED in the wood till I feared my absence would create remark; arguing with myself, changing from one mood to another, without power, seemingly, to control the throbbing excitement of my thoughts.

As I climbed quickly up through the nut-wood, for to-day it seemed impossible to move slowly, I told myself that I was always governed by ideas, and not by realities. When I thought I should never see Captain Brand again, I had grown to believe that I loved him, and that his love was all that I wanted for happiness; I had

pictured a meeting when I should have confessed my faults and my love together; I had dreamed it over and over again; and yet now, when he was actually near me—when a few hours more would bring us face to face—I shrank from this meeting with actual fear.

I saw now that mortification was the chief cause of my pain this morning. I could not really wish to be Captain Brand's wife, and yet feel such a shrinking fear of him; and once more I said, "Shall I never, never know my own mind?—shall I always be self-deceived?"

I suppose the Abbé had advised his sister to leave me alone, for she went down to the village to see the Curé in the afternoon, and I occupied myself with Berthe. When I went into the cottage she was crying. I thought she was fretting for poor old Mathieu, for she much disliked being left alone, and I said so. Instead of answering, she turned her back on me. I

waited a little while, but she did not speak.

"Why do you not speak, Berthe?" I said, "I have come to be company for you while Mathieu is away."

"*Dame*, no." She shook her huge head vehemently; "it is not that; Berthe cannot tell it. Ah, *mon Dieu*! it is terrible Mademoiselle herself has said that all the folks at the Château are good, so Berthe must believe what they say. A—a—h!" here she broke out into a howl of anguish, and flung her blue apron over her head.

I sat down on a wooden stool, and waited till she had sobbed herself quiet again, and taken her apron from her swollen face.

"Who has been to see you, Berthe? and what is so terrible to believe?"

She looked at me in a shy, awed manner.

"It is Rosalie and Mathieu who have been here, Mademoiselle;" and then she shut her mouth, and looked obstinate.

A light broke on me. "And Rosalie

has said that I am not good, eh, Berthe?"

"Ah, *mon Dieu*!" Berthe clasped her large, red hands, and looked at me so piteously, that I could hardly help laughing. "It is not that; if Rosalie had said that, Berthe would have said it is not true, for Berthe has seen for herself that Mademoiselle is good."

"Come, come, I know what Rosalie thinks of me. I shall ask her, if you won't tell, Berthe."

She stared, and plunged her hand into her rough hair. "Rosalie has said" she whispered, "that Berthe puts her soul in danger if she loves Mademoiselle;" here the poor thing crossed herself, and glanced up at me with an agony of fear in her face.

"Yes, yes, I know," I said, soothingly; "go on."

"Then Mathieu has said that he, too, loved Mademoiselle very much at the beginning, and that his soul had been in danger, but Rosalie was angry with him, and taught him the truth. Oh, *mon Dieu*!

mon Dieu! what will Berthe do?" the poor creature sobbed—"she cannot lose her soul, and she cannot leave off loving Mademoiselle." She flung herself on her knees, and kissed my hands passionately, as they lay in my lap.

This, then, explained Mathieu's inattention and careless ways. Rosalie had told him I was a heretic. I hardly knew what to say.

"Berthe," I said, "I believe in the same God that you believe in, and He commands us all to love one another. Besides, Madame La Peyre, and Monsieur l'Abbé and la mère Angélique are all better and much wiser than Rosalie and Mathieu, and they all love me."

"But yes—but yes, it is this which Rosalie has told to Berthe," she started up eagerly at having recovered what she had forgotten, "and it is the most sad of all—Mademoiselle puts them all in danger." She got up quickly from her knees, and

actually drew away as far as she could from me.

I felt shocked and wounded.

"It is Rosalie who is wicked," I said indignantly, "and I shall think you wicked too, Berthe, if you don't speak out."

"But it is terrible," and she burst into another wild howl.

My anger vanished. I saw that the poor creature had been frightened out of all restraint.

"Berthe," I said soothingly, "it is not wicked to tell me what they say—it may do me good, and to-morrow you must go to see Monsieur le Curé, and he will tell you if it is wrong to love me."

I could hardly keep my voice steady; I did not know how much I cared for the love of this poor uncouth woman.

"Rosalie has said," she began, in the same monotonous drawl in which she always repeated what had been told her, "that a heretic belongs to Satan, and has

power to bewitch. Rosalie has said that she has made a *neuvaine* to the Blessed Virgin that la mère Angélique may be released from the power of Mademoiselle."

She stood gazing at me with an awe-struck face, as if she expected that at the words something terrible would happen.

I stood silent. Rosalie's bigotry seemed fiendish. Then a sudden thought struck me.

"Is that holy water in your *bénitier*, Berthe?"

I pointed to a little china stoup which Madame La Peyre had given to Berthe, and which hung on the wall beside her bed. She nodded.

"Then sprinkle some over me, and if I am a witch I shall fly out of window."

She gaped, but she obeyed, threw some of the water in my face, and reverently made the sign of the cross. Then she stood waiting.

"Well," I said, "you see nothing has

happened." I smiled, and held out my hand. But Berthe turned livid, and then she sank on her knees and prayed the Blessed Virgin and all the saints to pardon her for her wickedness. She caught at my hand and kissed it; I believe she would have kissed my feet, but at last I managed to soothe her.

"Rosalie is wrong, she does not love me," I said, as I was coming away; "but perhaps I am not kind to her."

Berthe shook her head.

"No—no—no one is wicked but Berthe. Once Monsieur Léon Leroux had a dog which bit him, and Marie Touchet has said that the dog must be shot; but Mademoiselle has done much more for Berthe than a master will do for his dog, and see what Berthe has done in return."

She did not cry; she only hung her head, and looked wretchedly penitent. I felt that I could not tell Berthe's usual comforter, Angélique, of Rosalie's mischief-

making, but I went in search of the Abbé. I knew there was nothing that would weigh with Berthe against priestly authority. I found him in his study writing. He listened to my story, but he did not seem as much troubled as I expected.

"Rosalie is crazy," he said, "no one in his senses listens to her. Poor Berthe, of course, must be warned against her, because she cannot judge; but Mathieu ought to know better. I cannot go and see Berthe again to-day, and I think she is best left alone, and it will not do to betray her to Rosalie and Mathieu. You must try to be heroic, my dear child; why, you are quite pale, Gertrude. I think,"—he paused a moment,—"that you must try a milder climate next Winter; however, to-morrow we shall know definitely what your future plans are to be."

He looked at his writing, and I went away; but his last words had roused fresh thoughts. If I am really Gertrude Stewart,

shall I have to go back to Tasmania to my home. I suppose I am unnatural; but I shrink from this. If my father wishes for me, it is my duty to go; but I am sure he will not wish for me. There is no love in the rare letters I receive from him and my sisters, like the love that surrounds me here; they seem, instead, to congratulate me on my good fortune, and I fancy they will be very unwilling to have me back. I have reason to fear my father is in difficulties, and I ought not to add to them, and yet if I stay here I am a burden on Madame La Peyre. Could I earn my own living? I can only think of teaching music, like the dear old Rouen professor; but who would employ a young ignorant creature like me; besides, I could not do it. I could teach poor ignorant people like Berthe to read; but then no one would pay me for doing that. As I think of Berthe I remember the Abbé's warning; how can I keep my promise to maintain

her? I cannot ask any favour of Captain Brand now. Ah! what a sharp pang comes with his name! I cannot set down how I feel towards him; I change every hour. At this moment I feel that, unless he loves me, the rest of life is dark and blank; and yet not long ago I was shrinking from the prospect of to-morrow, and feeling that I could never get courage to speak one word to him.

I am so worn and wearied by dinner-time that I go to bed very early.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MY GUARDIAN.

A GENTLE knocking at my door, very different from the sharp raps which Rosalie gave when she brought my coffee.

"How is Mademoiselle this morning?" says Angélique, and then she went on without any apparent consciousness of the importance of her message. "Monsieur l'Abbé has told me to say to Mademoiselle that Monsieur le Capitaine Brand has arrived last night, and that he will be glad to see her, when Mademoiselle is ready, in the study."

I do not know what answer I gave, but Angélique went away, and I longed to bury

my head in my pillow and to stay upstairs. Since that letter came yesterday and told me that Captain Brand's love was dead—either stamped out of his heart by some worthier object than I am, or withered out of life by his discovery of my misconduct; the shame of that last parting in the wood had come back strongly, I felt actual dread of this meeting, and I longed to ring for Angélique, and ask her to go with me to the study.

But there was no use in delay—the habit which in the beginning I owed to Angélique, of seeking a better help than my own instead of forecasting scenes and conversations, helped me now, and, when at last I was ready, I went downstairs in a calmer state than I could have thought possible. Still, as I opened the study door, I felt bewildered—I saw in a kind of dream first the Abbé and then Captain Brand come forward and greet me. But as I looked into Captain Brand's face, the change in it

roused me to reality. He looked so old, so sad, his blue eyes had sunk into his head, and his face was so thin and blanched. I stood gazing at him, letting him hold my hand. I need not have trembled with nervous dread, all thought of self was absorbed in the shock I felt at his appearance.

"You have been very, very ill," I said, and I could hardly keep from crying.

"Yes." Ah! his voice was not changed, there was the same hopeful strength in it that had always impressed me, but how I loved its sound now, "and Monsieur tells me you too have had a long illness." Then he turned to the Abbé and smiled, "I do not think illness has agreed with me so well as it has with Miss Stewart."

"She *looks* well now," the Abbé said gravely; "but she is not strong."

After this there came a pause; at last I said, "Are you really better?"

"Yes, thank you, I am all right."

Captain Brand was sitting thinking, with

his eyes on the ground. He roused himself when I spoke.

"You will have a great deal to tell us about your adventures." I wanted to say, "I long to hear them," but could not get the words out.

"I am afraid I shall not have much time for spinning yarns," he gave me such a pleasant smile; "I thought of going on to Paris to-night."

I longed to ask him to stop, but I felt that I must be very careful indeed if I meant to hide my changed feelings, and I must hide them—the ease, the smiling kindness with which he spoke to me, showed me that all his love had departed. My heart ached heavily.

"But no, Monsieur," the Abbé said, "we cannot consent. My sister has not even seen you, and I believe she and Angélique have been quite counting on having you to nurse—now that Gertrude is off their hands as a patient. You will give us a week at least, will you not?"

I felt that Captain Brand gave me a quick glance.

"Oh! yes," I said. "Madame La Peyre hoped you would stay some days—the rest will do you good."

I tried to be friendly, to speak with interest, and I felt that, instead, I had spoken formally, as if I were asking him against my will; I wished he would speak, and yet every instant of delay was a respite.

I suppose the Abbé thought the suspense trying, for he said presently:

"You had, I think, Monsieur, a special motive in seeking this interview with Miss Stewart?"

Captain Brand turned so pale that I was frightened; I wondered whether he was ill, or whether his apparent calmness was only feigned.

"Yes, you are right, Monsieur," he said, stiffly; and then, next minute, he smiled—ah! how blind I must have been not to have seen, long ago, the noble directness of purpose that shone out in his smile!

"I believe I am like a child—so ashamed of my former ignorance that I shrink from confessing it." Then he turned to me, and said, quickly, "You were quite right all through, and I was quite wrong. I learned this on my way home, and in London I verified it. A marriage contracted without previous asking by banns or permission by license is entirely illegal, and is valid only in a religious sense; but as long as Church and State hold together, this sense will not suffice for the ordinary requirements of life. You are as free as if the marriage service had never been said between us." Then he went on, in a low voice, to the Abbé: "In a few days you will receive a properly attested statement to this effect."

He stopped, but he did not look at me. I knew I ought to say something, but I could not tell what. If the Abbé had not been there, perhaps some words would have come to me; but in a few moments I

rejoiced that I had kept silence. I felt that the Abbé's presence had been a safeguard.

"Then, Monsieur, a second marriage would be necessary, if you wished to be Miss Stewart's husband?" said the Abbé, earnestly.

I did not look up at once. I felt that the answer to this would be my fate. A sudden suspicion came that Madame La Peyre had been telling her suspicion to the Abbé. I stiffened myself against any betrayal of feeling, and then I looked at Captain Brand; his eyes were fixed on my face; but I tried to appear quite unmoved. He turned to the Abbé.

"Certainly, Monsieur, it would have been necessary. I only wish I had known this fact two years ago. I could then have set Miss Stewart altogether, as well as virtually, free. I cannot say how sorry I am that this trouble has been laid on her. She has much to forgive." He looked

at me, and I felt confused and giddy. "If you really forgive me," he said, gently, "you will let me act as your guardian as long as you require one; and you will let me help in settling your future plans. Do you wish to go back to Tasmania?"

Every word fell on my heart like ice, telling me that his love was ended. It all went on so rapidly that I seemed only glad to think the interview must soon be over, only careful not, by word or look, to grieve Captain Brand; for it seemed to me that now any betrayal of my changed feeling must pain him as much as my former coldness. He pitied me; but, with all this taking of blame to himself, he had not forgotten my misconduct, and the gulf that it had made between us was always present to him. And yet, humbled as I was by this consciousness—longing to atone, in some way, for the past—all my nature rose up against the slightest self-betrayal. I felt ready to die rather than to let him guess

that I was ready to be his wife. I shrank, too, from accepting his generosity.

I kept silent so long, that the Abbé repeated the question. It was easier to answer him.

"You do not wish me to go away, *mon père?*" I looked up at him. "Ah, no! I am sure you do not. I hope I am not unnatural, but it seems best to say really what I feel; and I believe I can lead a more useful and happy life here than I can in Tasmania—" I could not say that I knew I should be looked on at home as an unwelcome incumbrance—"but—but I cannot bear to feel that I am dependent on anyone—"

I got so red and confused that I stopped, and Captain Brand would, I believe, have interrupted me, even if I had gone on speaking.

"Pardon me, you cannot be dependent on anyone but your guardian till you are twenty-one," he said, in that helpful, cheery voice, which made me long once more

to be the child he had brought to Château Fontaine two years and a half ago. How fearless I was then! I had nothing to be ashamed of. He went on gravely—"I gave a solemn promise to your mother to undertake your sole guardianship till that time, and nothing can release me. You have no will in the matter, for your father, the only person who has a right to interfere, has ratified the arrangement. Will you"—his voice was so sweet and winning now—"permit me to write to Mr. Stewart and explain all this matter for you? I promise you that no blame shall fall on you, and, indeed, this is not possible. I suppose"—he turned a smiling face to the Abbé—"that any Englishman but a thick-skulled sailor would have known the fact of such a marriage being illegal. I rather wonder it has not occurred to Mr. Stewart."

The Abbé seemed serious and disturbed. He only bowed to the Captain, but he looked very lovingly at me as he spoke.

"You had better do as Monsieur le

Capitaine wishes in every respect, my dear child," he said; "in obeying him, remember you obey your parents."

I longed to protest, but it was impossible—I could not get courage. Checked as I felt by Captain Brand's calm ease of manner, how could I say that my mother would not have allowed me to be dependent on a man who was not my husband?

"Then we will shake hands on the matter," he said, "and consider it settled that you continue at Château Fontaine."

"You are very good"—he was holding my hand, and I got courage to look in his face for a moment, and again his sunken eyes and wearied face stirred my heart—"but it does not seem right."

"I believe you cannot refuse my guardianship;" he smiled, and I thought his face beautiful as it lit up from eyes to lips with a glow of affectionate kindness; "and I hope you will not refuse me your friendship. I cannot hope to rival your friends here in your regard;" he looked at

the Abbé; "but I care very much not to be quite forgotten, even if we never meet again."

My heart beat so fast that I could hardly speak; if the Abbé would only have gone away, perhaps I should have been able to say what I thought of Captain Brand's goodness.

"It is not likely I can forget you," I said, in a hard, forced voice, which did not seem to be my own, "and I hope you will come again."

At this he let go my hand and turned quite away. I did not know whether he was displeased or disappointed; but I felt that the interview was over. I looked at the Abbé, and he evidently understood me; he came forward and opened the door.

"We will join you at breakfast very soon," he said, "and we must keep Monsieur le Capitaine a prisoner among us."

"Yes, yes;" and I was able to smile cheerfully as I passed out of the study.

CHAPTER XIX.

HEART-SICKNESS.

I HURRIED to my own room, full of misery and self-reproach, but when I opened the door there was Madame La Peyre waiting for me.

"Pardon, my dear child;" and then, having guessed the state of my mind while she seemed only occupied in giving me two soft kisses, she said, "I am so anxious to hear how Monsieur le Capitaine is looking, my Gertrude."

I put both hands on her shoulders and looked fixedly into her sweet dark eyes. It was necessary that she should know the truth at once, no matter what pain it gave to tell it.

"He looks sadly altered and very old," I said quietly, "and he is very much troubled at his own mistake. That marriage on board the *Adelaide* was not a marriage at all, because there was no legal permission for it, and in England this is necessary."

Madame La Peyre looked puzzled and curious. "There is no more to tell?" she said, almost beseechingly.

"No more." I kissed her, for I wanted to hide my face. I could not keep the tears from my eyes. "I am to stay with you until I am so naughty that you will not keep me, and Captain Brand is to be my guardian till I am twenty-one—that is quite all, except that you will have to persuade him to stay, for he says he is going on to Paris to-night."

But Madame La Peyre had recovered herself. She drew away from me, so that I could no longer hide my eyes on her shoulder.

"Gertrude, I cannot ask him until I know whether you wish him to stay."

"I"—what can I say? I have no answer ready, my heart is ready to burst with restrained feeling. "Will you laugh at me, Madame? I cannot tell you—by breakfast time I will have made up my mind."

"*Bien*," but she lingers till she sees I am hardened against further confidence, and then she leaves me alone.

Do I want Captain Brand to stop? I do not know. It is torture to be with him, and to feel that once, as he told me, he loved me with all his heart, and that now he—well, he pities me, and is willing to be my guardian. It will be torture when he goes; will he ever come back? What does he care for Château Fontaine, or for me either? And why do I care to think of him so much?

Yes—yes, I know it now. I can hardly write it down, but it has come to me this

morning with a power that terrifies me with its vehemence, which I know is real, for it quivers in every fibre of my body, that—well, that I shall never be happy again unless he cares for me as he did once.

But this is mere folly, for he will never think of me in the same way again; what did he say to the Abbé?—said it calmly and easily too. Why should I torture myself with his presence? Is it quite too late?—if I tried to make him see I care for him would he not forget the past? I feel as if I must blot those words out. What! despised already for my want of truth, I could stoop to seek love where I am completely unsought! and besides, I do not know whether this feverish wish to be with him is love. I believe it is only the unsatisfied longing I have to confess all my faults to him and to be really forgiven; to be in his opinion as he told me I was, before that terrible meeting in the wood. He

forgives me now out of his unbounded generosity, but I should like to tell him everything myself; my foolish fancy for the Count de Vaucresson, about Mr. Donald, and all that happened at Merdon, and then hear him say, "I forgive you." He may have given up all wish to make me his wife, but could he help loving me one little bit if I could get courage just once to show him what I think of his goodness and nobleness—I think of no one else—he is my hero; I am quite sure I shall never marry because there is no room in my heart for love—it is filled with Captain Brand.

If he goes away at once, I think, I hardly know why, but I think he will never come back. If he stays a few days I may get a chance of speaking to him; but shall I ever get courage; no, it is a new strange kind of timidity I now have with Captain Brand, but it masters me; and I do not think it is likely to diminish. Well, I have got no answer ready for Madame La Peyre?

and there is no use in seeking one; if Captain Brand and the Abbé are at breakfast Madame cannot ask questions.

As I open the door of the *salle*, I hear that they are all assembled.

"He has been travelling in the East," the Abbé says.

Captain Brand sits with his back to the door, and he does not know how near I am—

"Then he has not been here lately?"

"Not for a year," the Abbé says, and the pause that follows my appearance tells me that they have been speaking of Eugéne de Vaucresson."

I take my place and try to eat some breakfast, but I am ill at ease. A strange, self-conscious timidity besets me, I keep on wondering if Captain Brand is looking at me, and, when he is silent, I wonder what he is thinking of.

"Thou must take Monsieur le Capitaine to see Berthe," Madame La Peyre says, when breakfast is at last ended, and

then she tells the history of my *protégée*.

"I shall like to go, very much," he answers, "and you will come too, Madame, will you not?"

I wonder why I am wounded that he is so evidently indifferent to me; if my timidity is as real as I think it, surely I cannot wish to find myself alone with Captain Brand. No, I do not wish this, but it is hard to feel that I am no more to him than Madame La Peyre is, perhaps not so much. I am not sure, if she had proposed to take a walk with him, that he would have asked me to be of the party.

I used to think all that I read in books about the contradiction in a woman's nature was foolish, but I think differently now. When Eugéne said he loved me, I shrank from him more and more; as long as Captain Brand seemed to care for me, I almost disliked him; and yet, now, I feel that I should like Monsieur de Vaucresson to come just for five minutes, that Captain Brand might see which I really like. Ah, he

should not be left one minute in doubt. I knew that the Count was in the East, the Abbé told me so, but I had not heard of his return.

To-night, as I write down the day's doings, I feel so listless and wearied that I almost resolve to give up the habit; if to-morrow is as full of disappointment as to-day has been, why should I set down the weary details? I can just put—so much heart-ache, so much hope, so much of struggling with shyness, so many, oh! so many unshed tears, I can feel them clinging round my heart and stifling me with the dull weight they have brought there. I can write this down, but not the pain of every hour.

We went to see Berthe, and she was shy and would hardly speak; and then we went to the church—Captain Brand had never seen it, and he greatly admired it; and then Monsieur le Curé took possession of him, and Madame La Peyre and I walked back alone.

"The Captain is going to stay," she said.

I did not answer, and she left me in peace. She went on talking about Margot, the Curé's housekeeper, and some embroidery cotton she had asked for.

By the time dinner was over, my head ached so badly that even the Abbé noticed how pale I was, and Madame La Peyre rang for Angélique, and handed me into her charge, to be put to bed, just as if I were still ill. The only nice thing that has happened is that, when I said good night, Captain Brand held my hand an instant, and looked at me very earnestly.

"I am afraid you are still far from well."

His voice was so kind that tears came into my eyes; as I did not want him to think me foolish, I did not look at him; I only said, "I shall be better to-morrow, thank you," and I went off with that dear, discreet Angélique, who brushed my hair quietly, without even seeming to notice the tears that kept on rolling down my cheeks.

CHAPTER XX.

"AU COIN DU FEU."

THE Abbé has dragged Captain Brand off to see the ruins of St. Wandrille, a few miles off. It appears that I am not considered strong enough for so long an expedition. They will probably dine in Caudebec, and not be home till evening. On the whole, I believe it is a relief. There was a decided constraint in Captain Brand's manner towards me this morning —a complete absence of that frank, brotherly manner which he had at first. I must have offended him yesterday, but I do not know what I have done. I will ask Madame La Peyre; and yet, when I am

alone with her, she so completely avoids the subject of Captain Brand, that I cannot find the opportunity I want. Something—I could not say in what it consists, it is scarcely more than a slight instinct—makes me shrink from giving this dear, sweet woman the slightest insight into the mental torture in which I am living; for I am tortured, and I see that it would have been better, much better for me, if Captain Brand had gone away yesterday. If he were really gone, and I knew there was no chance of his coming back, I think I should get over this self-conscious torment.

As the evening comes on, I get into a flutter of expectation. We have dined, and Madame La Peyre and I are together in the salon. The days are lengthening out, but we are always glad of a fire at Château Fontaine, except in July, and the first days of August. We are sitting beside the fire; the candles in the sconces against the wall have not been lighted. I think Madame

La Peyre is asleep, and I go on thinking of Captain Brand.

He has been here two days, and how little he has spoken of his adventures! If I questioned him, would he talk more of himself? I cannot tell how it is, but I feel a sort of false shame in speaking to him before the Abbé and Madame La Peyre. I have scarcely volunteered a direct question; and, as I seem to get more and more timid, I suppose this state of things must continue, and that he will go away convinced that, though I no longer dislike him actively, still he is perfectly indifferent to me. Well—and I have come to the beginning of my circle again—why do I wish anything else? He plainly feels no special interest in me, only his natural kindness and generosity make him take a pleasure in fulfilling his promise to my mother.

"Gertrude!" Madame La Peyre's voice startled me, I thought she was sound asleep; "why dost thou sigh so heavily, dearest

child, and why dost thou so often look at the clock?"

I pushed my chair still further into the corner, shadowed by the projecting fireplace.

"I hardly know why I sighed. I fancy a sigh is the result of one's mood, rather than of any special thought. Don't you think that, when one is tired or sleepy, one is quite as apt to sigh as when one is sentimental? I was thinking that the Abbé is very late."

For answer I heard a deep sigh.

"Gertrude," she said, presently, "thou art greatly changed. I do not think thou wouldst suffer petulance to stand between thee and happiness, and yet I am puzzled. It has seemed to me, in all these months of suspense, that thou mightest be gay and bright again, if only Captain Brand were restored to us; and yet he is here, and I cannot see that thou art happy. What is it, my child?"

I longed to trust her fully, to cross the slippery space of shining wood between us, and put my head on her shoulder, and ask her what this torment was which made me long for Captain Brand's presence, and yet, when I was near him, made me so tongue-tied and uneasy; but though I loved my sweet old friend dearly, I could not quite trust her. She might imagine all sorts of things, and she might take upon herself to speak to Captain Brand about my feelings.

"I am not used to him," I said, quietly, "and our last parting was so very uncomfortable that I fancy we must both feel a restraint when we remember it. Next time he comes I shall be far more at my ease."

"I only hope there is no mistake," she sighed again. "I confess that Monsieur le Capitaine puzzles me more than thou dost. I have an idea that even the wisest men do well to take counsel sometimes."

Has she been trying to discover Captain

Brand's feelings, and has she been baffled? Before I could ask a question the noise of dogs and wheels announced our travellers, and they soon appeared in the salon. The Abbé was full of enthusiasm; he had not seen the ruins of St. Wandrille for some years, and he launched out into elaborate descriptions of them. Captain Brand seemed tired; he had taken a chair beside me, and he appeared to find as much interest in the smouldering logs in the grate as I did.

"Do you ever make stories and pictures out of the fire?" I say at last; I seem to have forgotten all my torture; for the first time since his arrival I feel at ease and happy beside him. He has not spoken one word, and yet some undefinable sympathy tells me that he shares with me this great happiness of silent companionship.

"No," he says, and without looking up, I know that he is smiling. "I am not poetical enough; but I like to watch the

sparks fly up the chimney. It puts me in mind of the time when I was a boy."

Then we are quiet again. It is like a rough awakening from sleep when Mathieu appears with candles, and Madame La Peyre says it is time to go to bed.

Reading my account to-night of these last days, it seems empty and monotonous —a mere record of getting up with a heavy heart, and going to bed with the burden in no way lightened. I shall not write my journal again till I have really something better worth setting down.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN WHICH I SAY GOOD-BYE TO CAPTAIN BRAND.

I HAVE kept my resolution. Two days have gone by, and I have not chronicled them, and now I can scarcely write down what has happened.

Yesterday began better. We all went to the Mill, and, laughing and talking with Madame Roussel, somehow I seemed to get less shy. I actually showed Captain Brand the view of the Seine, and pointed out Le Trait, &c.; but as we walked home he left me of his own free will to go and talk to Madame La Peyre. The Abbé, seeing this desertion, came and walked beside me; but, instead of listening to him, I was trying to

hear the talk of our companions walking just behind.

We drove to St. Antoine, but Monsieur and Madame Dupont were out, and the talk was chiefly about the country through which we had passed, and the various ruins within reach of Château Fontaine.

"I should like to see some of these old castles and abbeys," I said.

"I wish I could have stayed to bear you company," said Captain Brand.

"There is nothing more easy, my dear sir; we will all go together." I see that the Abbé is on his hobby in the matter of ruins. "We will, if you please, go to Lillebonne to-morrow."

"You are very kind, but I must not indulge myself with a longer holiday; I purpose going on to Paris to-morrow morning."

I felt a kind of shock, but the Abbé and Madame La Peyre both spoke at once.

"Ah! but it is not possible; this visit

is so real a pleasure that Monsieur le Capitaine will not shorten it."

There were tears in Madame's eyes as she entreated, and then she turned to me.

"Thou art disappointed that Monsieur le Capitaine goes away; is it not so, Gertrude?"

Captain Brand fixed his eyes on me with a very curious expression in them.

"I hoped you would have stayed longer," I began, and then self-consciousness stopped my tongue, and there was an awkward silence.

"I believe"—Captain Brand smiled round at us; he was certainly quite self-possessed—"that I ought to have kept to my first intention; but life was so pleasant here that your kindness was hard to resist. I have so very much to arrange and settle still, that I must return to England. I left London in too much haste last week."

"But you will return to us," Madame said, "when the business is ended?"

Captain Brand bowed.

"You are very good to me, Madame. Yes, some day I hope to see Château Fontaine again."

After all I believe it is a relief that he is going away, only I wish I had been less cold and stiff. During the evening I try to speak and look pleasantly at Captain Brand, but he just answers me, that is all.

At last I offer to sing, though I know what an effort this will be. But when I get to the piano I only dare venture on one or two very ordinary songs of a lively kind, and he does not seem to care much for them. When I go back to my chair in the corner he does not come to sit beside me, he is bent on looking at some huge books which the Abbé, with Mathieu's help, has dragged in from the library—engravings of abbeys and churches and castles of Normandy. They are to me profoundly uninteresting, for they are represented just as the artist has thought fit to draw them,

not as they must look in nature; they seem all got up for effect.

Madame La Peyre goes and looks over her brother's shoulder, and presently she calls me to share her admiration; but I find there is not room for more than three at a time, so I have to come back quietly to my chair in the corner. How long and weary this evening is! Is it the last I shall ever spend with Captain Brand?

"You will not start very early to-morrow," Madame La Peyre says beseechingly.

"I thought of going about twelve," he answers.

During the night I determined to thank Captain Brand for all his kindness and goodness before he went away, but just before I went downstairs I looked out of the window. It was a clear, bright morning, not so warm, but almost as full of sunshine, as that morning when we drove away from Château Fontaine, and I felt as if I could only be happy away from Captain

Brand and with the Comte de Vaucresson. Why did that bitter, foolish mistake come back so strongly now? I think it was from the strange power that associations have on memory. Far off, near the gates —not in the avenue, but on the left, among the larches—I can make out the Abbé talking with the Captain. Unless he goes down to mass, the Abbé does not go out so early. How very fond he must be of Captain Brand! I sometimes wonder how they understand one another; for the Abbé's English is about as indifferent as Captain Brand's French is.

The Abbé announces at breakfast that business calls him to Paris, so they can start in company.

"It is a pleasant arrangement for me, is it not, Madame?" the Captain says; "but I have to say good-bye to Monsieur le Curé. So, Monsieur, I will start, first, and you will kindly pick me up at the Presbytère."

"Then, Monsieur, you will give us your

company to the village, will you not?" says Madame La Peyre; "Gertrude and I are going there."

I had not heard of this visit to the village before, but I took no notice; I was glad, I saw in it a chance of saying what I wanted. When I come back from getting my hat, Captain Brand is standing alone in the hall. I hurry down stairs. I will speak to him; there is just time.

"Captain Brand," I begin, and then I hear Madame La Peyre coming downstairs. "I cannot let you go away without thanking you for all your generosity and kindness to me. I want to say, too, that"—I feel how stiff and hard my voice is, and I stop.

Captain Brand takes my hand in his, and says, so kindly, "Please, don't say anything; and please understand that nothing I do for you is kind or generous either—it is simple duty."

He lets go my hand as Madame La Peyre comes in sight, but I am sure she

noticed something, she looks so inquisitive.

She begins to talk at once, and she and Captain Brand have the conversation to themselves. I go on thinking of his words. We are just opposite Mathieu's cottage, and Madame La Peyre says, "Ah, *mon Dieu!* I had forgotten; I must speak to Mathieu. Will you then, dear child, go on with Monsieur le Capitaine, and take this cotton to Margot at the Presbytère."

Margot is the housekeeper of Monsieur le Curé, and Madame La Peyre often makes her a present of some of the fine embroidery cotton she gets from Paris; but to-day this errand seems unreal and fortuitous, and I feel a strong conviction that Madame La Peyre is only arranging that the Captain and I may be left together. I feel rebellious against anything that seems arranged, but after those words of his just now about duty, I am almost indifferent to anything that may happen. He feels no pleasure, then, in anything he does for me, it is all

duty—only a duty. Madame La Peyre says good-bye very sweetly to Captain Brand, and kisses her hand to him as she disappears within one of the green doors of the cottage. Then we walk on a little way in silence.

"Well," he says at last, for I leave him to break the silence; "many changes may happen before I come again, do you not think so?"

"I suppose that must depend very much on the length of your absence."

I daresay I do speak coldly, and I cannot help it; it is unnatural that I should care to see Captain Brand again, if he cares nothing for me—it is unwomanly, even.

"That may be quite beyond my own control," he says gravely; "and I am not sure that circumstances depend on length of time. Sometimes a year may go by without any event worth speaking of—I mean, in its effect on our individual lives; and then in one week, sorrows or joys, or

both together, come so rapidly as almost to overwhelm us."

I thought of his mother's death, and I wondered how I could have forgotten it.

"Was your mother very old?" I said softly.

"Yes, much older than you would expect. She married late in life. Her death was very sudden; even if I had been in England, I could not have been summoned in time."

He walked on silently, and I did not like to speak, for I guessed he was thinking of his mother.

"What I meant just now," he began abruptly, "was that, when next I come to Château Fontaine, I may, perhaps, not find you here—you may be married." He said the last words with an effort.

I felt stung and wounded through all the cold indifference I had assumed.

"I do not know why you should think so; I see no one here."

"That is just what I have been saying to Madame La Peyre; it must be dull never to mix with young people—you will pardon my interference, will you not?—and she has promised to take you to Rouen; she has many friends in the neighbourhood. And in the Winter what do you think of a visit to Paris? You would like to see the theatres, and I fancy you will enjoy some balls."

"You are very kind; but I am quite content to stay at Château Fontaine. I—I am quite happy."

He is not content with hinting his indifference; he actually wishes me to find a husband, so that he may be rid of me. He seems to think me ungrateful, for he speaks coldly.

"You only know Château Fontaine; wait till you have seen Paris. You have no idea how gay and bright it is."

"Should we be likely to see you in Paris?" I say at last; and I am angry with myself for the interest with which I say it.

"Certainly, if I can be of any use to you there. I thought you would have felt sure of this, Gertrude—I beg your pardon—but I mean that my duty is always to devote my time, or advice, or anything that can be of use to you, to your service."

Oh, how horribly cold and unsympathising he is! It is cruel to be so unforgiving. Why cannot he say pleasure instead of duty? Ah, he would if he felt it.

"Then, supposing"—I only say supposing, it seems to me so very unlikely—"but if I were going to be married, you would give your advice if I asked it?"

I force myself to smile and look up at him. I must let him see that, though I am respectful and grateful, I am as indifferent as he is. He gives me one searching look, but I do not flinch—I feel sure he cannot read anything in my face—and then he looks away.

"Well," he says presently, with an uneasy laugh, "I fancy that is just the one

thing on which a woman never follows advice, even if she seeks it; she has generally chosen before she knows it herself."

"Do you think so!" I forget everything but the interest of at last hearing my own feelings spoken by another person.

"Well, is it not the truth that a woman seldom knows that she loves till her eyes are opened to the fact by another person?"

"You mean, then, that if a woman loves —no matter how unworthy the person— she will refuse to take advice against her love?"

Captain Brand looked at me so earnestly that I felt timid and confused; it seemed as if he was going to say something and checked himself. He laughed this time much more easily.

"I suppose I really mean that I would rather not be consulted on such a subject, but I certainly hope you will honour me by telling me when your choice is made."

"If you wish it." I felt so wound-

ed that tears came into my eyes, but I tried to be as cool as he was. "I hope you will do the same—but perhaps your marriage is already settled?"

I could not look at him; my heart beat so fast, till his answer came, that I felt stifled.

"I—I beg your pardon; I have not thought of it." Then his troubled tone changed to the easy playful voice which so vexes me: "well, perhaps I may marry some day, when I am older and wiser; it is possible, of course."

We had not reached the Presbytère, but I saw Margot gossiping at a neighbour's door, and the Captain saw her too.

"I must not take you any farther down hill," he said, "it is so steep to mount alone. Well, it is hard to say good-bye. God bless you, my dear child! you will let me call you that till you are married, will you not?"

He had got both my hands in his, and

I looked up—ah! at the tenderness in his eyes all my pride melted; I forgot in my folly that it was only his brotherly pity.

"I shall never marry!" I said; "please don't think so. Good-bye."

And, in the terror that seized me, I drew my hands quickly away, and hurried off to Margot and her circle of gossips.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN THE WOOD.

IT is only a week since he went away, and it seems more like a month. I wonder how I could say that I was content to live always at Château Fontaine. My eyes seem to have opened to its dulness. I believe I am growing wicked, for I feel a want even in Madame La Peyre and Angélique, and Berthe's mistakes make me horribly cross. I am only happy when I am alone, free to dream of Captain Brand. I suppose I show my discontent, for to-day I saw Angélique look in her deprecating way at Madame La Peyre when I found fault with the cake at dessert.

When we were left alone, my sweet old friend said,

"We will go and see my cousin at Dieppedale, Gertrude, as soon as my brother comes back; he is delayed at present by some business of Monsieur de Vaucresson's; he had to go to Paris to meet him."

I had guessed this previously.

"Does the Count live in Paris?"

"He is there for a short time, but he has been travelling almost ever since his mother died. Probably he will now lead a more settled life. I hope it will not vex thee, dear child, but Monsieur de Vaucresson has declared his intention of visiting Château Fontaine. The Abbé will do all in his power to dissuade him, but he has written to me to prepare thee, as Monsieur de Vaucresson says he must come—he has something special to say to thee."

"I cannot see him unless you are with me."

"Without doubt I will be with thee, but

my brother seems to think that, as this young man is determined, it is better that thou shouldst see him in a formal manner, or he may vex thee by meeting thee unexpectedly."

"Yes, oh yes, I think so, too. I should much dislike that," and I shrank with something very like disgust from the remembrance of that last meeting in the carriage. Madame La Peyre does not speak any more of Eugène, and I try, instead, to think of staying at Dieppedale and Rouen. I suppose I owe this change in my life to Captain Brand. I do not care how much I owe him now, my pride seems dead. When I think of that look in his eyes, I know that he still cares for me. He does not love me perhaps in the way he did once; but he thinks of me as if I were a dear sister. When I sit alone and think of him, I am very, very happy; it is only the looking forward to weeks, and months, and years, when I shall perhaps never see him

again, that makes life seem so weary.

If I could live in a dream of him, I could always be happy, and yet somehow I am not content with myself. Madame La Peyre and Angélique are as kind and good as ever, but I tire of them; and poor Berthe is really not more stupid; it is I who am less patient. Yes, I am glad to go away; it will make a break, and I can begin life again when we come back.

"I hope we shall have fine weather," I say to Madame, "or we shall not see much of Rouen."

"But it is certain to be fine, my child" —I do not think I ever heard Madame La Peyre anticipate evil—"it has rained for four days."

It seemed as if her words were to come true. Next morning there was not only a clear sky and sunshine, but there was that balmy sweetness in the air which tells that all is new and fresh and young, the very breath of Spring. I was therefore sur-

prised at my dear friend's troubled face when we met at breakfast.

"Thou wilt probably receive the visit I spoke of to-day, my child, so we will stay in this morning."

She spoke with so much constraint that I did not like to question her. It seemed to me that, if I told Monsieur de Vaucresson decidedly in her presence that I did not wish to see him, he could not in common courtesy repeat his visit. I felt as I remember feeling when I was told as a child that the dentist was coming to look at my teeth, and I wished the morning was over. I could not help comparing my feelings with those of hardly more than a week ago, when we were expecting Captain Brand's arrival; I had no nervous flutter to-day, only the shrinking of intense dislike.

As I could not pay my usual visit to Berthe, I went to the study. I had promised to set the Abbé's books in order for

him, and I had put off this task day after day, because doing it would disturb my long delicious reveries.

"I used to delight in doing anything for the Abbé," I thought, with self-reproach; and I tried to set diligently to work.

I was in the middle of a shelf of heavy, dusty, brown volumes, with Latin names on the backs, when a tap came at the door. It was Madame La Peyre.

"Gertrude,"—she looked very timid—"if the Count should present himself to me, and ask thee in marriage, what—what answer am I to make?"

"Oh, Madame! how can you ask such a question? I have told you I shall never marry; besides, he will not ask me."

"Thou hast said so, but then thou wast not free; all is changed now."

"I can never change; I can never give any other answer," I said decidedly.

She sighed, but she went away at once, and I felt ashamed of my vehemence.

I had gone on with my work for about an hour, and then came another tap. This time it was Angélique.

"Mademoiselle," she said, gravely, "Madame is engaged in the salon with Monsieur le Comte de Vaucresson, and she will be glad if Mademoiselle will join her. But"—Angélique's formal manner vanished as she looked at me—"what has Mademoiselle been doing? Her hair is rough, and her dress is powdered with dust—ah! but she is quite spoiled."

"Come and put me to rights, then," I said, very glad of a few minutes' reprieve.

Angélique evidently considered the interview very important. She made my hair as smooth as possible, and persuaded me to put on a pretty new *batiste* dress which she had just made for me; then she went on before me to the door of the salon, glancing over her shoulder to see that I was all right.

I made a deep curtsey to Monsieur de

Vaucresson as I entered. He looked much older and more serious than when I last saw him. Madame La Peyre turned at once to speak to me, but he interrupted.

"Pardon, Madame; you will at least permit me to speak for myself. Mademoiselle,"—his voice had a soft, pleading tone, that might, perhaps, once have moved me —"forgive me for intruding myself on you; I have, indeed, much to ask forgiveness for, but we were both the victims of a mistake. Now that you are free, and that time has proved to you the power and strength of my devotion, will you not listen to me?—will you not do me the honour to become my wife?"

I had not given any weight to Madame La Peyre's judgment, and I felt taken by surprise. All the resentment I had summoned up against his intrusion was disarmed, and yet I did not feel one bit less of the shrinking I had from him. But I answered, as gently as I could,

"Monsieur, I thank you for the honour you have done me, but I do not wish to marry."

"This is impossible! pardon, but it is impossible!" His eyes sparkled, and he spoke very fast. "Madame, you will join with me in telling Mademoiselle that it is unheard of that she should remain unmarried. You are surprised now"—he spoke to me—"I have been too sudden. When you have reflected, you will give me a different answer." Then he bent forward, and said in a low voice, "Ah! Gertrude, do not be unforgiving to one who loves you dearly."

I had never thought of anything like this. I looked at Madame La Peyre, but she put her handkerchief to her eyes, and seemed quite touched by the Count's appeal. I could only think of Captain Brand, and wish he were there, to tell me what to do.

"Monsieur," I said at last, "I am sorry, you will make me speak plainly, but I

cannot marry unless I love, and, therefore, I must remain unmarried."

He frowned slightly. "I am not afraid," he said, "if you will be my wife—that is all I ask for—the rest will follow."

"I cannot—indeed I cannot. I do not wish to offend you, but that is the only answer I can give."

"Pardon;"—he came forward and placed himself beside me, and then he whispered, "Why will you not forgive me, my beloved? I know you love me, but your dignity requires my humiliation. Must I, then, kneel to you?"—he bent one knee, and his face was full of sadness.

I looked reproachfully at Madame La Peyre. I thought she ought to help me.

"Madame, will you not speak, you know my feeling; as I cannot convince the Comte de Vaucresson, will you tell him that you know I am quite in earnest?"

Madame sighed. I began to see that she thought I was hard. The Count had risen, but he stood close to me.

"Monsieur,"—I tried to speak soothingly, for I did not want to make him angry—"I believe you are in earnest, and therefore I am the more bound to be in earnest also. I cannot love you, it is not in my power, and, therefore, it is better that we should not meet again. Good-bye," and I held out my hand.

He kissed my hand, and then made me a profound bow, but he did not attempt to prevent my departure; he even came forward and held open the door for me.

Poor Eugène! When I reached my room, I could not help crying; it did seem very hard that I should have changed so much. And yet he himself caused my dislike. I cannot forget his conduct; perhaps, too, I have not changed. I do not think I ever loved him. I never sat and dreamed of him himself, I only thought of being with him, and of the amusement he gave me.

I feel a warm tide rushing up even to

my forehead, and my face sinks, glad to hide between my hands. There is no use in questioning myself. I know what I have been fearing and doubting about so long—that from the day Captain Brand left me at the foot of the ivy stump, he has been the only man I cared to think of, and Eugène has been only a boy.

I was still in this confusion, half sad, half delicious, when Madame La Peyre came asking for admission.

As she kissed me, I said:

"You were very naughty just now not to interfere."

"Ah, my child, but thou art cruel. How could I make the poor fellow still more unhappy?—the poor Eugène, he so loves thee, and I should like to see my Gertrude a Countess."

"Is that it? But you care more that I should be happy."

"Yes, it is true," she sighed; "but the poor fellow has gone away broken-hearted."

"I am glad he is gone—it is much better; but indeed he will soon find some one more fitted to be his wife."

She still looked sorrowful, and shook her head. "Come, let us go and see Berthe; we have been shut up all day."

I felt more grieved to have disappointed Madame La Peyre than about Eugène; somehow I could not believe in the reality of his love. She was unusually silent till we reached the cottage, and then we both burst out laughing at what we saw.

Mathieu had been painting the doors a brilliant green, and, I suppose, had left his paint-pot and brush on the ground outside. Berthe had evidently been seized with a desire for extra usefulness; there she stood on the grass before the cottage, her right hand brandishing the paint-brush, while with her left she held Mathieu's walnut-wood arm-chair, now, alas! a brilliant green. But she had also painted her face with splashes, her hair, her gown, her

sabots even, had not escaped the universal tint; and as she turned round to face us with the uplifted brush, I expected we should get painted green too.

"V'là, Mam'selle," she pointed to the chair with a grin of triumphant delight. "Aha! it is Mathieu who will be pleased. Mathieu has gone to Caudebec, and when he comes back, he will think it is a new chair that Berthe has got for him."

"Berthe!—but he will not be able to sit in the chair; the paint will be quite wet."

Berthe gazed wistfully, first at me, and then at the chair, and then plunged her painted fingers in among her hair—her usual resource when puzzled.

"Does Mam'selle think, then, that it will not be dry by evening?"

She stood staring with her mouth wide open; evidently some sudden and fresh puzzle had presented itself.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she burst out crying; "what, then, will Mathieu have to sit on

when he comes in and he is tired? Berthe has painted all the chairs."

We tried not to laugh, for her distress increased to sobs. Madame La Peyre comforted her a little by telling her she would send down two old chairs.

"But you must never paint again, Berthe," she said, "unless under Mathieu's orders; and you had better change your clothes before he comes home, and get the paint off your hands and face."

Berthe looked ruefully at the unfinished arm-chair; but with her usual dog-like obedience she put down the paint-brush and went into the cottage.

"There is an end of Berthe for to-day," I said. "Now what shall we do? Madame, you have always promised to trust yourself to my rowing; will you come now?"

I did not feel inclined to talk; I was just in the mood for the slow movement of a boat through the water. Madame La

Peyre drew her shawl round her and gave a little shiver.

"I will wait a little, my dear child, till the sun has more power. After four days of rain I fear the boat will be damp—too damp for thee, even, Gertrude."

"Oh, no. I am so out of practice that a good hard row will save me from taking cold; but I will not stay long. *Au revoir.*"

I was really glad to be alone. I scarcely know what had put the boat into my head, unless it was the hope that Madame La Peyre would not talk to me while I rowed. I had only visited the wood on the other side of the stream once since I met Captain Brand there, and then I had felt so full of shame and misery that I resolved not to go there again.

But since this I had gone through a complete change of feeling. Whenever I recalled the last look I had seen in his eyes it seemed to me that I was entirely forgiven. And it was shorter and pleasanter

to cross the river behind Mathieu's cottage, and find my way to the bridge through the wood, than to climb up the Château again, and descend through the nut wood, there being no path along this bank of the stream.

I went through the wood very slowly, thinking now of Captain Brand, now of this morning's interview. I felt timid as I drew near the ivy stump, for it was so directly in the path that I knew I must pass it, and it was still full of painful remembrance; but just before it came in sight I saw some one coming towards me through the wood. The leaves were still scanty on the trees, so that I was scarcely a moment in doubt. It was Monsieur de Vaucresson. I stopped short and looked behind me; there was no one in sight, and if I turned back the Count could overtake me in an instant.

"I knew you would come," he said; "I have been waiting." He smiled, and looked quite happy.

"I am sorry you have waited, Monsieur," I said gravely; "I did not come to meet you."

"My charming Gertrude," he said, "pardon, but why will you keep up this farce? You have done enough for prudery to-day. Be kind, be as you were when you first came to Château Fontaine, when my love was all you desired."

"You are mistaken, Monsieur;" he tried to take my hand, but I drew back proudly. "I—I did not know what love was then, I mistook gratified vanity for it; I know the difference now." I felt I was growing crimson as he stared at me, and I stopped.

"You know the difference now!" he said passionately. "*Mon Dieu*, what is this I hear? You have deceived me. Why did you not say this to-day? Who has taught you this difference? I insist—I will know."

All my courage had fled now I had come to the brink. I felt that I could not trust this man. I could not put it in his power to say I had even confessed to myself my

love for a man who did not love me. He muttered something I did not understand.

"We are doomed to interruptions," he said; "there is some one on the bridge."

I turned in a kind of ecstasy. I felt capable of hugging even deaf Baptiste, in my joy at a chance of escape.

On the bridge there was—I could hardly believe it, it seemed as if my eyes must be playing me a trick—but, actually, there stood Captain Brand, not coming towards us, but gazing as if he had just perceived us, and hesitated to advance. I forgot everything but my longing for protection, and I beckoned to him.

How quickly he came! It seemed as if he cleared the space between us by magic. I shrank to his side at once, and put my hand in his. Even in that moment of excitement I noticed that no greetings passed between any of us.

"Monsieur," the Count said, haughtily, "is, perhaps, still the guardian of this young lady?"

"I have that honour—" I felt that Captain Brand clasped my hand tightly in his— "and, therefore, I may perhaps ask your reason for appealing to me."

Monsieur de Vaucresson threw his head back, I thought arrogantly.

"Monsieur, I have to-day asked Miss Stewart to be my wife, and she has refused. I have again this moment asked her, and I have demanded a reason for this refusal; for, as you yourself saw, Miss Stewart loved me well enough when we first met at Château Fontaine."

The grasp on my hand had grown almost painful, and I could hear a deep, low breathing, that sounded like suppressed anger.

"I saw that *you* admired Miss Stewart, that was all," said Captain Brand.

"It is false!" I did not think Eugène's eyes could flash so angrily. "She loved me; she always spoke of you with contempt; and now she says that she loves

some one else. Ah! *mon Dieu!* Monsieur, I tell you, as her guardian, I have a right to know who is this some one else before I leave Château Fontaine."

I felt the grasp slacken, then loose hold, and I nearly fell to the ground. But Captain Brand was not looking at me; he had come forward, so as to place himself between me and the Count; his eyes were fixed on Eugène de Vaucresson.

"Monsieur, in this lady's presence I pass over your violent language," he said; "I am quite sure Miss Stewart has given you a true answer, and it is not fair to press your suit on her in this way. She is incapable of coquetry; if there were any hope for you, she would give it. You would, would you not, my dear?"

There was a secret pain in his voice, which seemed to take away my senses. I hardly know what Eugène said next, but all at once I heard the words:

"I tell you she is utterly false, Monsieur.

Free from coquetry! Bah! she loves some stranger; she owns it."

"Silence, Monsieur!" very sternly; then Captain Brand's voice came, in such deep sadness that my heart seemed almost to break as it listened,

"What is this, Gertrude? It is false, is it not? Say so quickly."

But the Count would not wait for my answer.

"Monsieur, I swear to you, on the honour of a gentleman—and I think," he said, with a sneer of passionate scorn, "that that is better worth than the word of a woman—that she only just now said some one had taught her what love was. Can you deny it?" He looked at me with such fierce anger that my courage came back.

"I said to you, Monsieur,"—I gave one little imploring look at Captain Brand, but he did not take my hand in his—"that I had mistaken the vanity you gratified for love."

"And after—what did you say after?"

"After, Monsieur!"—I was stung out of all self-control, my one thought was to refute this slander, and regain Captain Brand's confidence—"I said I had learned the difference; but I never said a *stranger* had taught mé," and then I covered up my face with my hands.

I felt a strong arm round me; I heard the words said, calmly and politely, "Monsieur, you are answered, and I am satisfied;" and then I heard the sound of a muttered curse, and the tread of retreating footsteps.

The strong arm wound itself closely round me. "My own darling at last!" he said. . . .

I am not going to describe the moments that came after. I do not think I could describe them. Perfect happiness, like perfect beauty, mocks words and defies analysis; and I cherish the belief that no one was ever so happy as we were. I say

no one advisedly, for how it came about I know not, I only know that it has been impossible to think of ourselves since those precious moments as two persons.

He would stop at the ivy-covered stump on our way to the bridge, and ask my forgiveness for all the cruel words which he said he had there uttered.

"Come," he said, at last, "let me row you in this boat—I shall be jealous if you say No."

But I thought of Madame La Peyre and of Angélique; it seemed as if they ought at once to know my happiness, and I said so.

"It shall be as you like," he said. "I cannot contradict you in anything to-day; afterwards I may turn out such a tyrant that you will perhaps repent your choice; but," he went on, laughing, "I believe your dear old friend guesses. As I came up the avenue, I saw her and asked for you. She said you had gone to find the

boat. 'But why do you want Gertrude?' she said."

"And did you tell her?"

"I told her what I have been trying to force myself to believe ever since I went away, that there was a possible hope even for a rough, weather-beaten fellow like me, and that it was better to risk a refusal than to yield up tamely all the happiness of my life. And yet, Gertrude, when I saw you first in the wood, just now, all my hope faded, and I thought myself a conceited fool."

"Did you?" I seem to have lost all power of looking saucy; every time I steal a glance up at him I feel happier.

"You do not ask what Madame La Peyre said, Miss," he went on, after a little; "she said, 'Have no fear, my friend; if you had not come, I should have written to you, and I should have written this afternoon to tell my brother, the Abbé, to seek you. Now do not ask questions, but go quickly and find Gertrude; you

must meet her, if you cross the rustic bridge.'"

"She was going to write to you, *par exemple!* I fancied you had had enough of taking me from anyone but myself. Oh, I must punish her for such an audacious thought," and I darted off up the nut-wood.

He overtook me in an instant. "You tried that once before," he said, "at Merdon, but I advise you to let it alone in future." And certainly he gave me no chance of escape till we came in sight of the Château.

"I believe I am sorry you came back, after all. I see you have not cured yourself at all of the masterful ways you had at sea; you have been acting sweetness and gentleness like a perfect hypocrite."

"Well"—when that smile spreads over his face it becomes beautiful—"I don't know what to say about hypocrisy; what has become of the silent, languid, formal young lady I found here only a week ago,

when, but for little glints of sunshine that sparkled out against her will here and there, I should have been frozen to death?"

"Then why did you come back to such a disagreeable person?—"

As I look up and see the deep, unspeakable tenderness in his face, a loving reverence steals over me, and I go back gladly into silence and shyness.

"To tell you that I should have to go back a long way, my darling. Did you think that such a love as mine is for you could be stamped out, as I own I once tried to stamp it out of my heart? Why, ever since I left you crouching under that tree, I have told myself I was a hard-hearted unforgiving brute; I have had no peace. I believe my best excuse was that I had hoped so desperately to win you by giving up all the rights I thought I possessed, that I had gone through a good deal of torture which you never suspected each time I came to Merdon. When I met you

again here, you looked so—ah, my darling, you don't know how I felt when I saw you, and then to find out that, as I thought, another man had got your love——well, I was very hard, and very cruel, and I hope I shall never forget it."

He broke off, but I could have listened for ever. This strange new eloquence was the greatest joy I had had even in this happy morning; it seemed to be giving me the key of his heart—that heart I longed so to understand.

"Please to go on—I love this so," I whispered, and I leant more heavily on his arm.

He went on again presently.

"All the time we were in the ice I felt a keen remorse. I had left you in anger, and I sailed without even trying to ascertain if there was any possibility of getting the marriage set aside; and there I was penned up, and perhaps should never see England again. But it was still worse on the voyage home.

One of our fellow-passengers was an English barrister; and, in general conversation, the question came up accidentally about sudden marriages. I put to him a case like ours—he said, 'That would be no marriage,' and he gave the reason. The shock took away all my strength, and I was on the sick-list for the rest of the voyage home. I daresay you thought me very cold when I told you the truth. I was really so miserably ashamed of the way you had been treated, and the restraint that had been put into your life, you darling little pet, that I could hardly look you in the face."

"No, oh! no, it was you who were badly treated; but still you have not said why you came back to-day."

He did not answer at once.

"I have been trying to find an answer, my child, and I cannot. Don't you believe in instincts, Gertrude? I do. Well, my first instinct came when old Mathieu said you had worn mourning for me, and he

supposed you would be well now I had come back; then other little things came to me on my way back to Paris. Perhaps after all it was a little look in your own dear eyes that kept on whispering, 'Go back, go back,' so loudly; I wonder if the look meant that."

"I shall never tell you what it meant. But are you sure the Abbé said nothing?"

"Nothing. He seemed completely absorbed in the return of his pupil—the only thing he said which might have given me hope was that he wished I had stayed longer at Château Fontaine. Are you satisfied now?"

"Not nearly; you must tell me ever so much more; but there is no time now."

As I hurry across the garden it seems to me that we shall never get time to say all we must say to one another. Will he ever tell me, I wonder, the whole story of his love from the beginning?

I ran up the corkscrew staircase. Rosa-

lie opened the door by which it led on to the gallery, and for once I felt loving to Rosalie.

"Where is Madame, Rosalie?"

"Madame is in her bedroom; but Mademoiselle cannot go to her—she is very busy with la mère Angélique."

"So much the better," I said, as I tapped at the door.

I believe Rosalie was beginning to interfere, but Angélique opened the door, and when Rosalie saw me clinging round her mother's neck—I suppose the sight was too much for her—she retreated at once.

When I had kissed Angélique I took shelter in Madame La Peyre's arms—stretched out fondly towards me—but instead of telling my joy, to my own great surprise I began to cry, and it was some time before I could calm myself. Madame cried, too, for sympathy, and I saw Angélique rub those bony knuckles across her eyes; but she was the most self-possessed of the three.

"Then Mademoiselle is happy at last," she said.

"Yes, you dear old thing, so happy that I don't know what to do, and your words have come true, after all. To-day I found my happiness when I only went to find the boat."

"My child," said Madame, softly—she kept on petting now my hands, now my hair, now giving me soft kisses, in her overflow of sympathy—"tell me, will the Captain take thee away from us, or will he leave thee here when he goes to sea?"

"When he goes to sea!"—an undreamed-of horror seems to chill my blood—"Oh, Madame, if he ever leaves me to go to sea again, I shall die!"

But I have never been so tried; my darling husband has given up the sea, and he has not taken me away entirely from my beloved French friends. We have spent every Summer at Château Fontaine, and

Angélique and Madame La Peyre have vied with one another in spoiling "the young Captain;" as they call our eldest boy; the Abbé takes possession of his little sister, and, I fancy, gets completely tyrannised over by that young damsel, who developed a rare spirit of coquetry before she was three years old. When she tires of the Abbé she takes refuge with Mr. Dayrell, who is often at Château Fontaine. When we went there with our first baby, I—still cherishing a belief in the tragic possibilities of Rosalie's character—had an uneasy fear lest she should do the child a mischief, simply because it was mine; but time has cured this fear, and I see that the story I once read of the green-eyed, yellow-lashed woman gave me at first sight an exaggerated estimate of this poor half-witted creature.

Berthe is broader than ever, and I fear she is almost as dull, but she is always good and loving. I believe the Abbé would like us to live at Château Fontaine, but

he has promised some day to accompany Madame La Peyre and Angélique in one of the visits they sometimes pay us in our English home.

Madame La Peyre says at every visit, in her pretty way, that she gets too old for the voyage; "but what will you?" she says to my husband, and looks at me—and she comes nevertheless.

And now what more can I add? There is no use in describing happiness like ours. I love my friends so dearly that, in spite of the keen pain much of this record has given me, as, bit by bit, I have put it together, I find it hard to leave off. The occupation of so many months and years has become very dear and engrossing, a part of my life that I feel bereaved without; only a doubt steals over me whether I have been able to picture forth in any true shape the husband who now forms the whole of my life, the hero of my story.

Some time ago the Abbé wrote to tell

us that his pupil, the Count de Vaucresson, had at last married.

"He has married a rich widow," the letter said—"Madame la Marquise de Guyon; she is older than he is, but she has a fine château near Rouen, and a mansion in the Chaussée d'Antin. Eugène has grown fat, and very bald, and Madame la Marquise has one shoulder higher than the other."

THE END.

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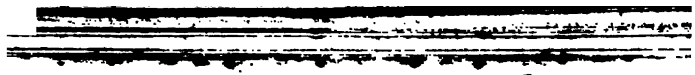

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